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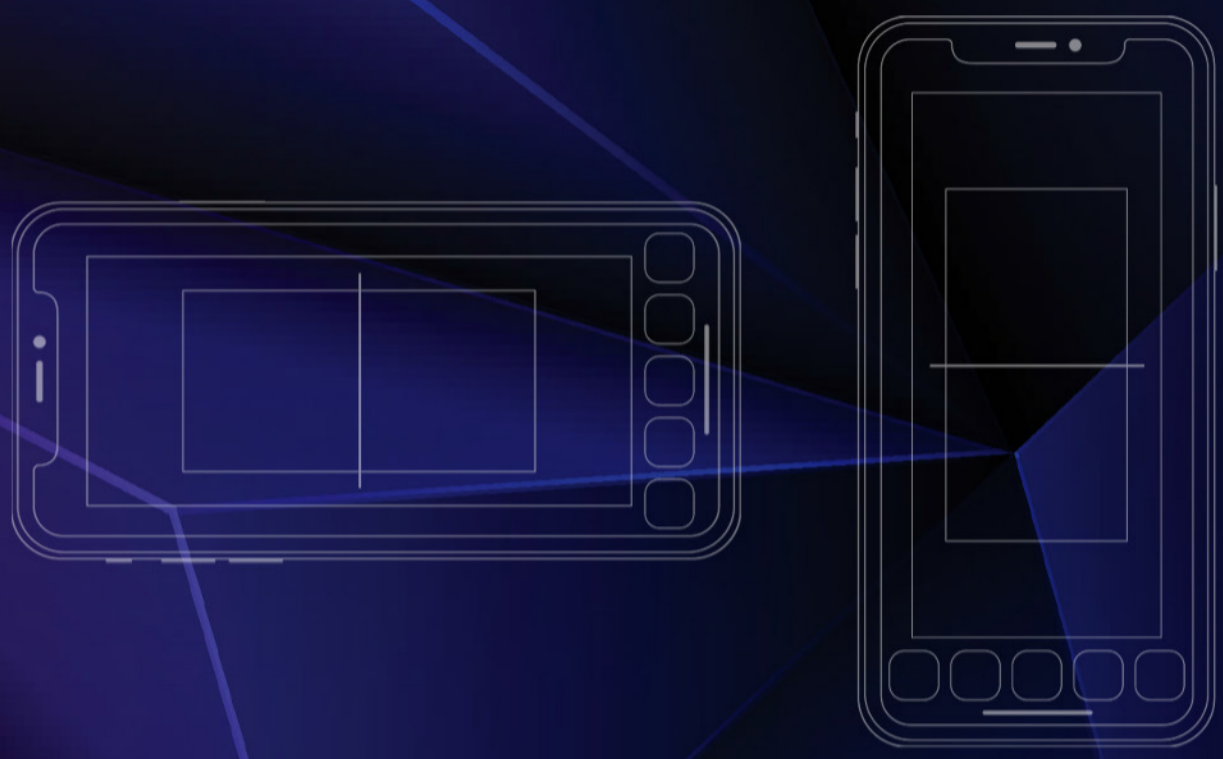

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Image: Mariam Zuhaib

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION WILL INVESTIGATE NATIONAL SECURITY RISKS POSED BY CHINESE-MADE 'SMART CARS'

Citing potential national security risks, the Biden administration says it will investigate Chinese-made "smart cars" that can gather sensitive information about Americans driving them.

The probe could lead to new regulations aimed at preventing China from using sophisticated technology in electric cars and other so-called connected vehicles to track drivers and their personal information. Officials are concerned that features such as driver assistance technology could be used to effectively spy on Americans.

While the action stops short of a ban on Chinese imports, President Joe Biden said he

is taking unprecedented steps to safeguard Americans' data.

"China is determined to dominate the future of the auto market, including by using unfair practices," Biden said in a statement Thursday. "China's policies could flood our market with its vehicles, posing risks to our national security. I'm not going to let that happen on my watch."

Biden and other officials noted that China has imposed wide-ranging restrictions on American autos and other foreign vehicles.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said connected cars "are like smart phones on wheels" and pose a serious national security risk.

"These vehicles are connected to the internet. They collect huge amounts of sensitive data on the drivers — personal information, biometric information, where the car goes," she told reporters late Wednesday. "So it doesn't take a lot of imagination to figure out how a foreign adversary like China, with access to this sort of information at scale, could pose a serious risk to our national security and the privacy of U.S. citizens."

Data collection is not the only concern, she and other officials said. Connected vehicles could also be remotely enabled or manipulated by bad actors.

"Imagine if there were thousands or hundreds of thousands of Chinese-connected vehicles on American roads that could be immediately and simultaneously disabled by somebody in Beijing," Raimondo said. "So it's scary to contemplate the cyber risks, espionage risks that these pose."

Image: John Keeble

MADE IN CHINA

Image: Eric Thayer

Few Chinese cars are currently imported to the United States, in part because of steep tariffs the U.S. imposes on vehicles imported from China. Still, officials are concerned tariffs are not sufficient to address the problem. Some Chinese companies seek to avoid U.S. tariffs by setting up assembly plants in nearby countries such as Mexico.

Under a plan announced Thursday, the Commerce Department is issuing an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking that will launch an investigation into national security risks posed by "connected vehicles" from China and other countries considered hostile to the United States.

Commerce will seek information from the auto industry and the public on the nature of the risks and potential steps to mitigate them, the White House said. Officials will then develop potential regulations to govern the use of technology in vehicles from China and other "countries of concern," including Russia and Iran.

"We're doing it now, before Chinese manufactured vehicles become widespread in the United States and potentially threaten our privacy and our national security," Raimondo said.

The investigation is the first action taken by the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security under executive orders Biden issued to protect domestic information and communications technology from national security threats.

Electric vehicles and other cars increasingly rely on advanced technologies to enable navigational tools, provide driver-assist features and reduce operating costs and carbon emissions through fast charging, the White House said. The cars are

constantly connecting with personal devices, other cars, U.S. infrastructure and their original manufacturer, posing national security risks, the White House said.

New vulnerabilities and threats "could arise with connected autos if a foreign government gained access to these vehicles' systems or data," the White House said.

High tariffs imposed by the Trump administration and continued by Biden have effectively deterred Chinese automakers from entering the U.S. market, but U.S. officials and industry leaders worry that Chinese companies might choose to absorb the additional costs as China leans more heavily on exports. Chinese car makers are looking to build more vehicles overseas, with EV giant BYD announcing plans last year for its first European plant.

Ford CEO Jim Farley said his company and others will have trouble competing on EVs with Chinese automakers, who have gone from no EV market share in Europe two years ago to about 10% now.

John Bozzella, president of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents major automakers, said proposed U.S. environmental regulations could let China gain "a stronger foothold in America's electric vehicle battery supply chain and eventually our automotive market."

The European Union, concerned about rising imports from China, opened a trade investigation last year into Chinese subsidies for electric vehicles. The investigation is ongoing.

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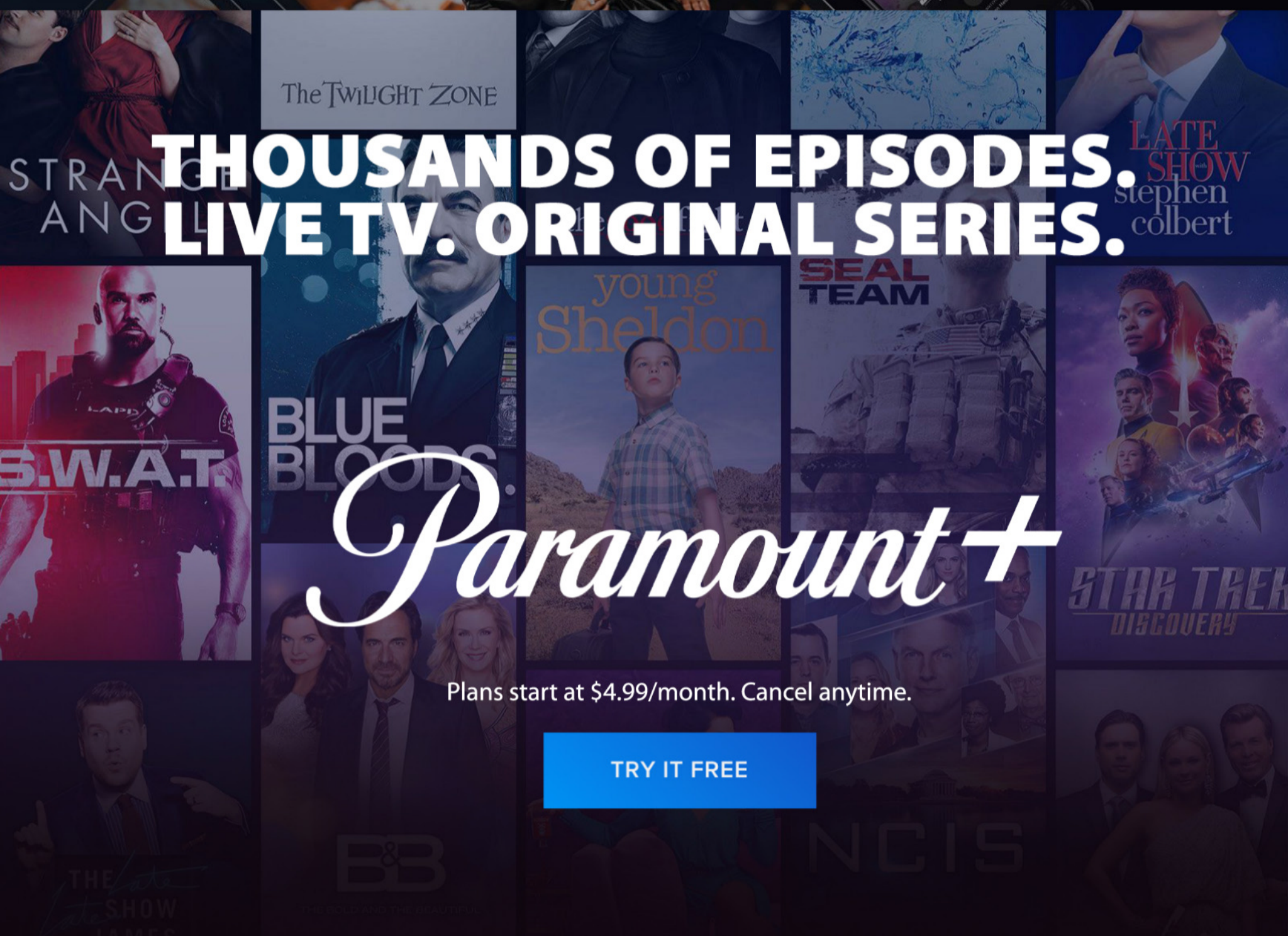

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DIGITAL OUTLETS THE INTERCEPT, RAW STORY AND ALTERNET SUE OPENAI FOR UNAUTHORIZED USE OF JOURNALISM

The Intercept_

Digital news outlets The Intercept, Raw Story and AlterNet are joining the fight against unauthorized use of their journalism in artificial intelligence, filing a copyright-infringement lawsuit Wednesday against ChatGPT owner OpenAI.

The organizations say thousands of their stories were used by OpenAI to train chatbots to answer questions posed to it by users, in effect piggybacking on their journalism without permission, payment or credit.

San Francisco-based OpenAI did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The already beleaguered news industry sees the practice as a financial threat. Some news outlets, including The Associated Press, have struck licensing deals for use of their material. After similar negotiations broke down, The New York Times filed its own lawsuit in December to halt the practice or receive compensation.

The three outlets suing OpenAI did not offer specific examples of stories they allege were stolen. But they said recreations of what ChatGPT used to train its bots turned up examples of material from the three news outlets.

"When providing responses, ChatGPT gives the impression that it is an all-knowing 'intelligent' source of the information being provided, when in reality, the responses are frequently based on copyrighted works of journalism that ChatGPT simply mimics," the lawsuit says.

While the Times, as a print publication, is able to pay for a federal copyright registration for all of its material in bulk, digital publications have no such ability. But lawyers for the three outlets suing Wednesday in U.S. District Court in

oped by OpenAI, based on the GPT (Generative
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Southern District of New York contend that their journalism is copyright-protected even without paying the fee.

Besides the Times, authors, including Sarah Silverman, have similarly sued the company for copyright infringement.

The Intercept lists Microsoft as a defendant because the tech giant has invested billions of dollars in OpenAI's artificial-intelligence efforts. Raw Story and AlterNet did not sue Microsoft because they have a news partnership with the company, a spokesman said.

The lawsuit asks for at least $2,500 in damages for each time one of their stories has been used by ChatGPT.

"As newsrooms throughout the country are decimated by financial imperatives to cut back, OpenAI reaps the benefits of our content," said Annie Chabel, chief executive officer of The Intercept. "We hope this lawsuit will send a strong message to AI developers who chose to ignore our copyrights and free ride on the hard work of our journalists."

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FORD ELECTRIC VEHICLE OWNERS CAN NOW CHARGE ON TESLA'S NETWORK, BUT THEY'LL NEED AN ADAPTER FIRST

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8B

Owners of Ford electric vehicles can now use much of Tesla's charging network in the U.S. and Canada, but there's a hitch.

They'll need to get an adapter that Ford will provide for free, although the company won't start shipping those until the end of March.

Last May, Ford became the first automaker to reach an agreement with the Austin, Texas-based Tesla to charge on its network, which is the largest and most well-placed in the U.S.

Tesla has more than 26,000 plugs and nearly 2,400 Supercharger stations across the U.S. and Canada. Ford said its owners will have access to about 15,000 Tesla fast-charging plugs that are located strategically along travel corridors. Ford owners won't be able to use some older Tesla plugs.

Most other automakers followed Ford in joining Tesla's network and agreeing to switch to Tesla's plug, called the North American Charging Standard, which is smaller and easier to use than the current plugs on most other EVs sold in the two countries.

Ford said adding the Tesla plugs will double the size of the network that can be used by Ford EV owners. There are nearly 166,000 Ford EVs in the U.S.

Ken Williams, director of charging and energy services, said a top concern of its EV owners is charging, even though they charge 80% of the time at home.

"We wanted to make sure we are meeting that need," he said.

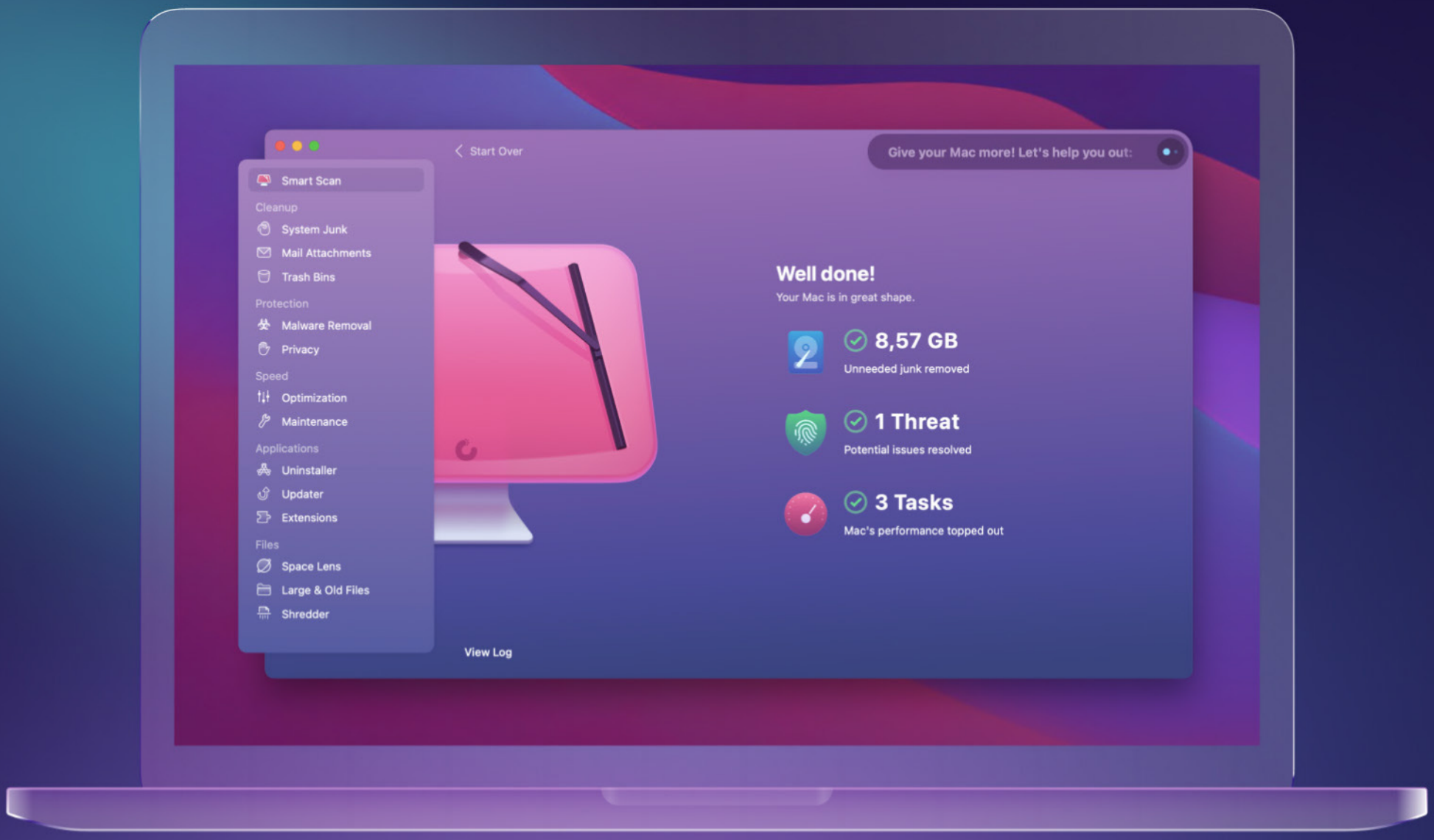
Ford is offering the adapters for free to the owners, who can sign up on the Ford.com website to reserve them between Thursday and June 30.

The company will provide one free adapter per vehicle.

Tesla's network was turned on Wednesday morning, and software enabling the Ford vehicles to charge at Tesla stations was to be sent out around the same time.

Ford will switch to Tesla's charging connector with its second-generation EVs starting next year.

Customers will pay Tesla for the electricity, and Williams said they can find out the price at Ford's mobile app and on public charging apps on vehicle touch screens.



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ONE TECH TIP: DON'T USE RICE FOR YOUR DEVICE. HERE'S HOW TO DRY OUT YOUR SMARTPHONE

You were walking next to a swimming pool when you slipped and dropped your phone into the water. Or it slipped out of your hand when you were next to a filled bathtub or toilet.

However your smartphone got wet, you now need to dry it. But what do you do? There's lots of advice on the internet, some of it conflicting. Apple inserted itself into the debate recently when it put out an advisory that included a warning against using rice.

Here are some things to keep in mind next time your phone has an unintended encounter with a liquid.

Image: Frank Augstein

Image: Jose A. Bernat Bacete

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Dry off the exterior with a towel or clean cloth, even your shirtsleeve — anything that's absorbent. Take out the SIM card and holder. If possible, remove the back housing and battery to wipe them dry. Also, if possible, turn the phone off.

iPhones can't be disassembled so Apple recommends tapping it gently against your hand with the connector ports facing down so liquid can flow out.

Samsung, which is the biggest maker of Android phones, recommends using a cotton bud to get moisture out of the earphone jack and charging port. In contrast, Apple says cotton buds shouldn't be inserted into iPhone openings.

If it's not water but another liquid — a drink, seawater or chlorinated pool water — Samsung advises soaking the phone in clean water for a few minutes then rinsing it to get rid of any impurities or salinity that could speed up corrosion of the circuitry inside.

Both companies say it's best to leave the phone out in a well ventilated area (perhaps with a fan) to dry it out. Google says leave the device to dry at room temperature.

WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T DO

Don't use a hair dryer or compressed air on your phone. Don't put it in a freezer - this might stop your device from short-circuiting but the problem will be back once you try to thaw it. And while this might seem obvious, don't put your device in a tumble dryer or on top of a radiator.

Don't power it up or try to charge it with a cable — although wireless charging is OK if your phone has it and you really need to turn it on in an emergency.

So what about using rice to dry your device? You may have heard that putting a phone in a bowl of rice will help draw out moisture. It's been a tip that's been out there for years.

Apple, however, says that's a no-no. The company warned against it in an advisory published in early January. It drew little attention at the time, but then people noticed the line that said: "Don't put your iPhone in a bag of rice. Doing so could allow small particles of rice to damage your iPhone."

IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN USE BESIDES RICE?

The best option is silica gel, a drying agent that can absorb lots of moisture. Silica gel beads are typically found in packets that are included with products like beef jerky, seaweed sheets or sneakers to keep them dry. You can also buy them in bulk online. This works best if you put them in an airtight box with your phone.

WHEN DO I KNOW IT'S DRY?

It's hard to tell but it's best to wait as long as possible — at least a few days. Samsung advises bringing your device into a service center for inspection even after it's been air-dried.

60%
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AREN'T PHONES WATERPROOF NOWADAYS?

Most phones nowadays are designed to be water-resistant, which means they can resist water entering critical areas for a certain amount of time. But beware, this isn't the same as being waterproof.

Apple says the iPhone 7 and and newer models are splash and water resistant. iPhone XS devices and up have the IP68 rating, which means they can be submerged for as long as 30 minutes and, depending on the model, as deep as 6 meters (20 feet). These models also pop up a warning if there's liquid detected in key ports, and warn against charging. Samsung says most of its Galaxy Android phones feature the same rating, though the maximum depth is about 5 meters (16 feet).

Google's newer Pixel phones carry the same water resistance ratings, but Google warns that they aren't waterproof and the water resistance will diminish over time because of "normal wear and tear, device repair, disassembly or damage."

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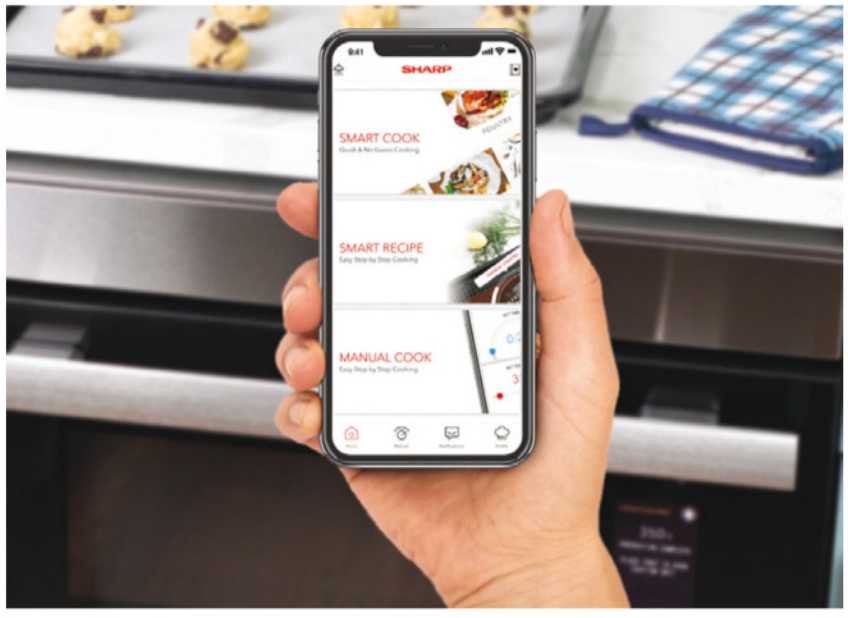

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KIDS ARE USING PHONES IN CLASS, EVEN WHEN IT'S AGAINST THE RULES. SHOULD SCHOOLS BAN THEM ALL DAY?

In California, a high school teacher complains that students watch Netflix on their phones during class. In Maryland, a chemistry teacher says students use gambling apps to place bets during the school day.

Around the country, educators say students routinely send Snapchat messages in class, listen to music and shop online, among countless other examples of how smartphones distract from teaching and learning.

The hold that phones have on adolescents in America today is well-documented, but teachers say parents are often not aware to what extent

Image: Rick Bowmer

students use them inside the classroom. And increasingly, educators and experts are speaking with one voice on the question of how to handle it: Ban phones during classes.

"Students used to have an understanding that you aren't supposed to be on your phone in class. Those days are gone," said James Granger, who requires students in his science classes at a Los Angeles-area high school to place their phones in "a cellphone cubby" with numbered slots. "The only solution that works is to physically remove the cellphone from the student."

Most schools already have rules regulating student phone use, but they are enforced sporadically. A growing number of leaders at the state and federal levels have begun endorsing school cellphone bans and suggesting new ways to curb access to the devices.

The latest state intervention came in Utah, where Gov. Spencer Cox, a Republican, last month urged all school districts and the state Board of Education to remove cellphones from classrooms. He cited studies that show learning improves, distractions are decreased and students are more likely to talk to each other if phones are taken away.

"We just need a space for six or seven hours a day where kids are not tethered to these devices," Cox told reporters this month. He said his initiative, which is not binding, is part of a legislative push to protect kids in Utah from the harms of social media.

Last year, Florida became the first state to crack down on phones in school. A law that took effect in July requires all Florida public schools to ban student cellphone use during class time and

block access to social media on district Wi-Fi. Some districts, including Orange County Public Schools, went further and banned phones the entire school day.

Oklahoma, Vermont and Kansas have also recently introduced what is becoming known as "phone-free schools" legislation.

And two U.S. senators — Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican, and Tim Kaine, a Virginia Democrat — introduced legislation in December that would require a federal study on the effects of cellphone use in schools on students' mental health and academic performance. Theirs is one of several bipartisan alliances calling for stiffer rules for social media companies and greater online safety for kids.

Nationally, 77% of U.S. schools say they prohibit cellphones at school for non-academic use, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

But that number is misleading. It does not mean students are following those bans or all those schools are enforcing them.

Just ask teachers.

"Cellphone use is out of control. By that, I mean that I cannot control it, even in my own classroom," said Patrick Truman, who teaches at a Maryland high school that forbids student use of cellphones during class. It is up to each teacher to enforce the policy, so Truman bought a 36-slot caddy for storing student phones. Still, every day, students hide phones in their laps or under books as they play video games and check social media.

Image: Rick Bowmer

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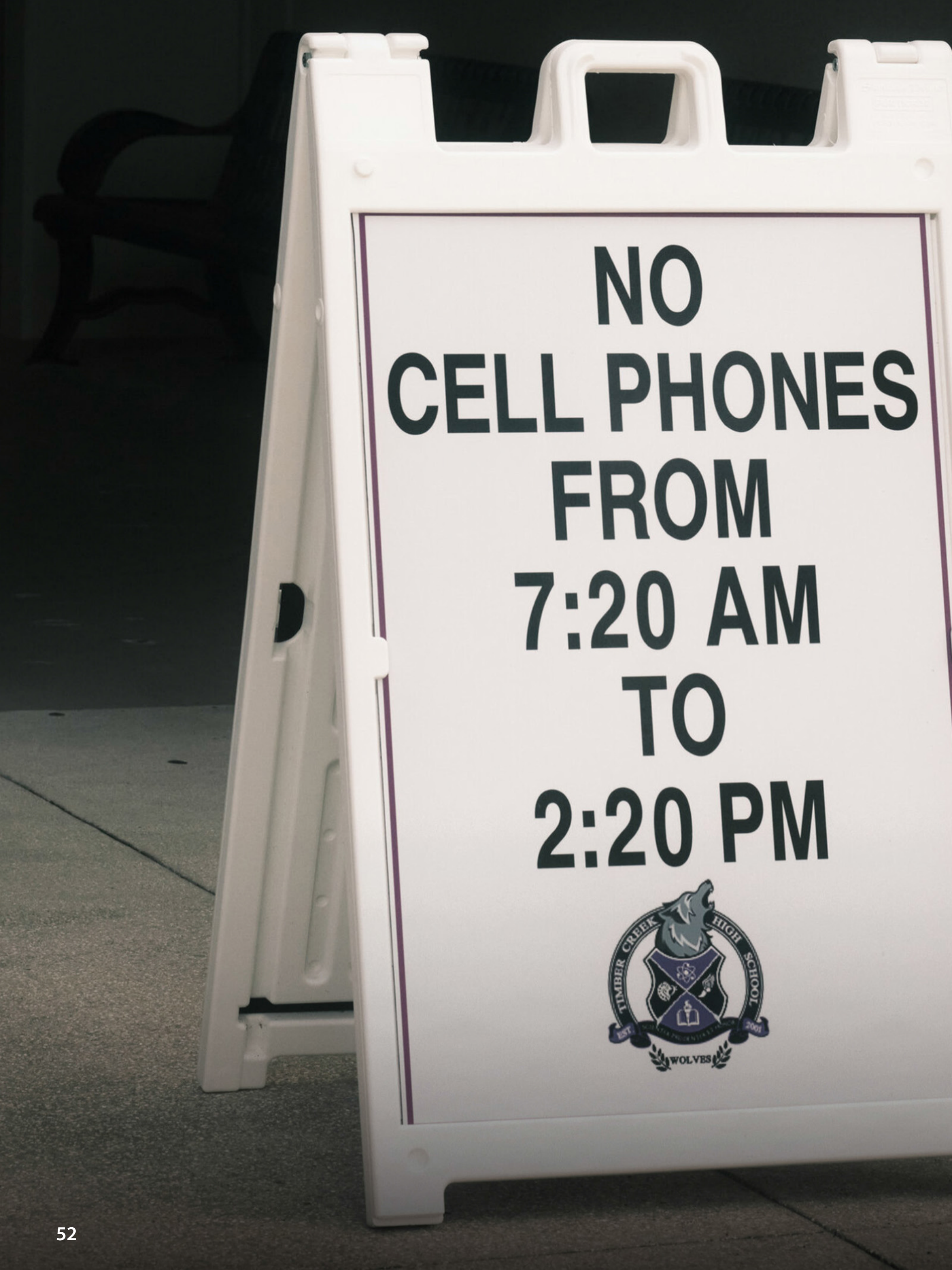
WHO LOVES


NO
CELL PHONES
FROM
7:20 AM
TO
2:20 PM
TIMBER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL
WOLVES

Tired of being the phone police, he has come to a reluctant conclusion: "Students who are on their phones are at least quiet. They are not a behavior issue."

A study last year from Common Sense Media found that 97% of kids use their phones during school hours, and that kids say school cellphone policies vary — often from one classroom to another — and aren't always enforced.

For a school cellphone ban to work, educators and experts say the school administration must be the one to enforce it and not leave that task to teachers. The Phone-Free Schools Movement, an advocacy group formed last year by concerned mothers, says policies that allow students to keep phones in their backpacks, as many schools do, are ineffective.

"If the bookbag is on the floor next to them, it's buzzing and distracting, and they have the temptation to want to check it," said Kim Whitman, a co-founder of the group, which advises schools to require phones be turned off and locked away all day.

Some students say such policies take away their autonomy and cut off their main mode of communication with family and friends. Pushback also has come from parents who fear being cut off from their kids if there is a school emergency. Whitman advises schools to make exceptions for students with special educational and medical needs, and to inform parents on expert guidance that phones can be a dangerous distraction for students during an emergency.

Jaden Willoughey, 14, shares the concern about being out of contact with his parents if there's a crisis. But he also sees the upsides of turning in his phone at school.

At Delta High School in rural Utah, where Jaden is a freshman, students are required to check their phones at the door when entering every class. Each of the school's 30 or so classrooms has a cellphone storage unit that looks like an over-the-door shoe bag with three dozen smartphone-sized slots.

"It helps you focus on your work, and it's easier to pay attention in class," Jaden said.

A classmate, Mackenzie Stanworth, 14, said it would be hard to ignore her phone if it was within reach. It's a relief, she said, to "take a break from the screen and the social life on your phone and actually talk to people in person."

It took a few years to tweak the cellphone policy and find a system that worked, said Jared Christensen, the school's vice principal.

"At first it was a battle. But it has been so worth it," he said. "Students are more attentive and engaged during class time. Teachers are able to teach without competing with cellphones. And student learning has increased," he said, citing test scores that are at or above state averages for the first time in years. "I can't definitively say it's because of this policy. But I know it's helping."

The next battle will be against earbuds and smartwatches, he said. Even with phones stashed in pouches, students get caught listening to music on air pods hidden under their hair or hoodies. "We haven't included earbuds in our policy yet. But we're almost there."

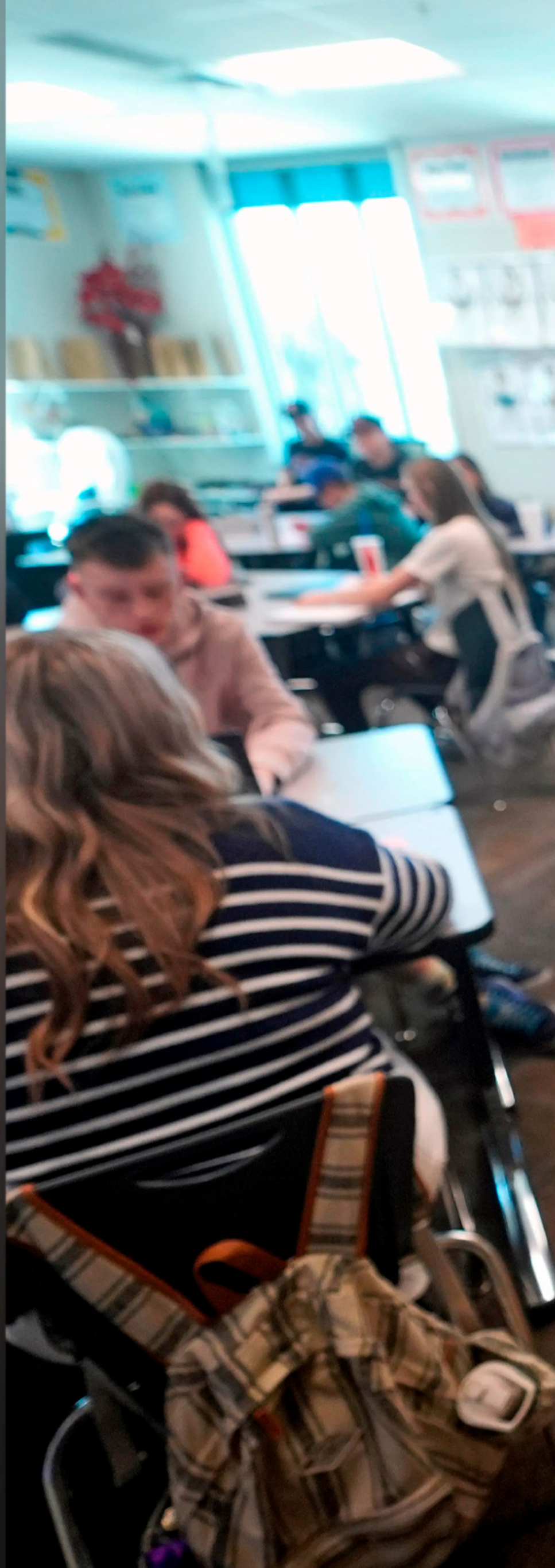


Image: Rick Bowmer

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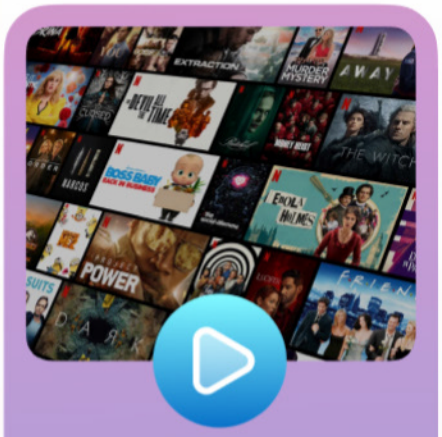

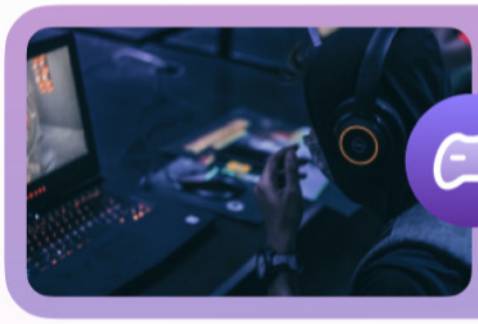

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PROJECT TITAN HALTED: APPLE ENDS ELECTRIC CAR DEVELOPMENT EFFORT

In a move that has surprised industry watchers and stakeholders alike, Apple Inc. has officially pulled the plug on its electric vehicle initiative, known as Project Titan, after more than a decade of speculation, investment, and development. This decision marks a significant retreat from what was once considered a groundbreaking venture into the automotive sector by the tech giant.

The closure of Project Titan was communicated internally by Apple's COO Jeff Williams and Kevin

Lynch, who had been at the helm of the project since 2021.

According to sources, this decision was the culmination of intense deliberations among Apple's top executives, including CEO Tim Cook, who had been under considerable pressure from shareholders to make a definitive call on the project's viability. The initiative had reportedly reached a critical "make-or-break point," necessitating a decisive move by the company's leadership.

Launched in 2014, Project Titan aimed to catapult Apple into the forefront of the electric vehicle market, embodying the company's ambition to redefine mobility with its trademark innovation and design prowess. Over the years, the project's scope and objectives saw several adjustments, with initial aspirations for a fully autonomous vehicle—lacking both steering wheel and pedals—being notably dialed back.

Despite the project's ambitious goals, the development journey was anything but smooth. Leadership changes were frequent, with Doug Field, a former Tesla executive, rejoining Apple to lead Project Titan in 2018, only to depart for Ford in September 2021. These shifts in leadership underscored the project's uncertain direction and the immense challenges of automotive innovation.

As part of the discontinuation process, Apple plans to redeploy some of the Project Titan team members to other divisions within the company, specifically the AI team led by John Giannandrea. However, not all employees will be afforded this opportunity, with Bloomberg

reporting that layoffs are inevitable, although the exact number remains unspecified.

The termination of Project Titan has not only surprised the nearly 2,000 employees working on the project but also sparked a wide range of reactions across the tech and automotive industries. Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and a pioneer in the electric vehicle space, acknowledged the news with a cryptic saluting emoji on X. Musk's own ambitions for autonomous vehicles, including a promise of a car without a steering wheel, mirror the high-risk, high-reward nature of the automotive innovation landscape.

The decision to cease Project Titan's operations underscores the inherent challenges of entering and revolutionizing the automotive industry—a domain that demands a unique blend of technological innovation, regulatory compliance, and consumer trust.

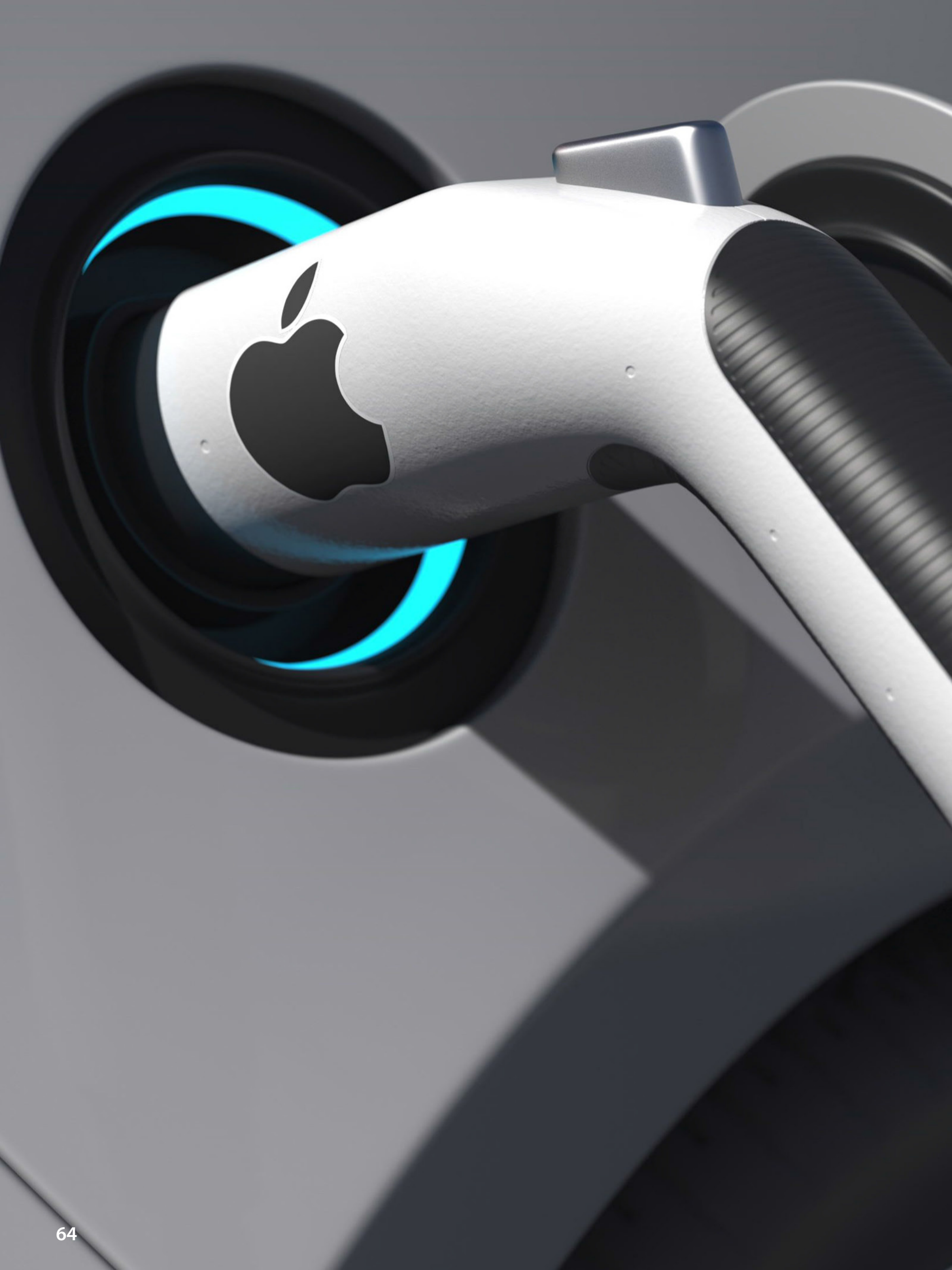
As Apple steps back from its automotive ambitions, the tech community and consumers alike are left to ponder what could have been and what the future holds for the company's innovation trajectory for vehicles and onboard systems.

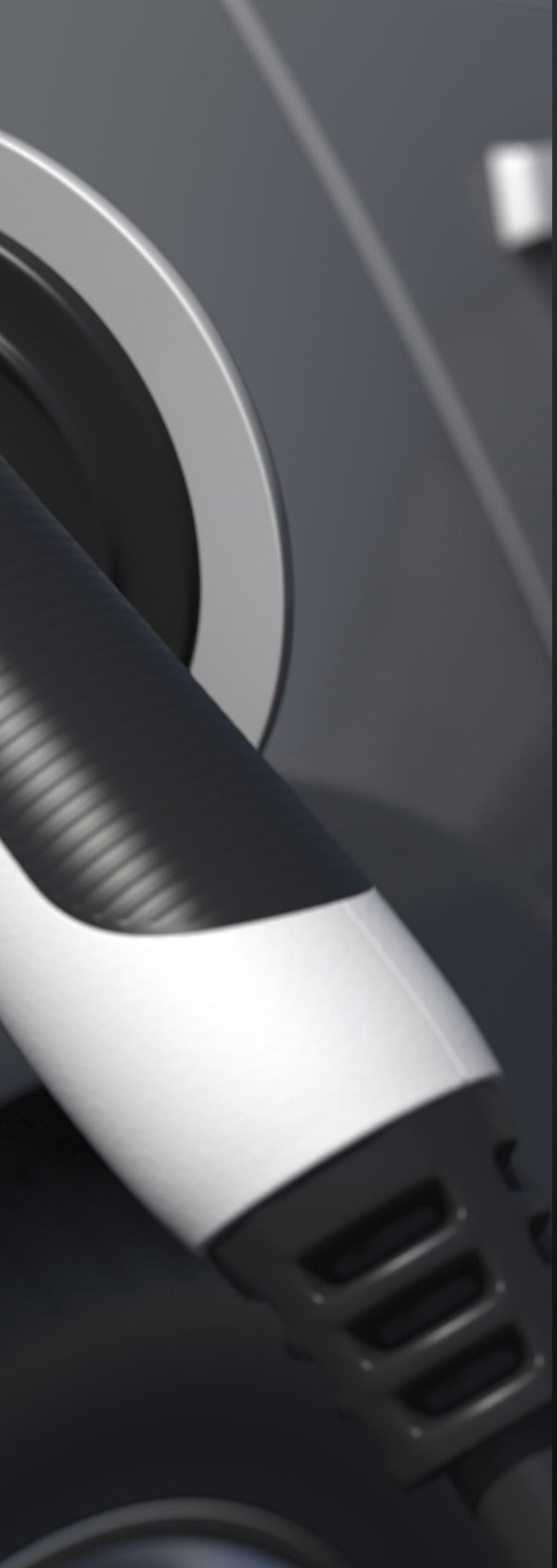
THE APPLE CAR

The Apple electric car project (codenamed "Titan") was an electric car project undergoing research and development by Apple.

The project was rumored to have been approved by Apple CEO Tim Cook in late 2014.

For the project, Apple was rumored to have hired Johann Jungwirth, the former-president and chief executive of Mercedes-Benz Research





and Development North America, as well as at least one transmission engineer.

In February 2015, Apple board member Mickey Drexler stated that Apple co-founder and CEO Steve Jobs had plans to design and build a car, and that discussions about the concept surfaced around the time that Tesla Motors debuted its first car in 2008. In November 2015, Former Apple iPod Senior VP Tony Fadell confirmed that Steve Jobs was interested in an Apple car back in 2008, shortly after the original iPhone was introduced. In May 2015, Apple investor Carl Icahn stated that he believed rumors that Apple would enter the automobile market in 2020, and that logically Apple would view this car as "the ultimate mobile device."

The company did not openly discuss any of its self-driving research, but around 5,000 employees were reported to be working on the project as of 2018.

In May 2018, Apple reportedly partnered with Volkswagen to produce an autonomous employee shuttle van based on the T6 Transporter commercial vehicle platform. In August 2018, the BBC reported that Apple had 66 road-registered driverless cars, with 111 drivers registered to operate those cars.

In 2020, it was believed that Apple was still working on self-driving related hardware, software and service as a potential product, instead of actual Apple-branded cars. In December 2020, Reuters reported that Apple was planning on a possible launch date of 2024, but analyst Ming-Chi Kuo claimed it would not be launched before 2025 and might not be launched until 2028 or later.

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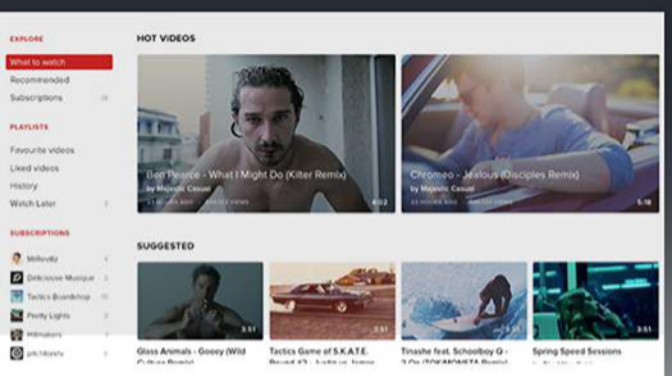

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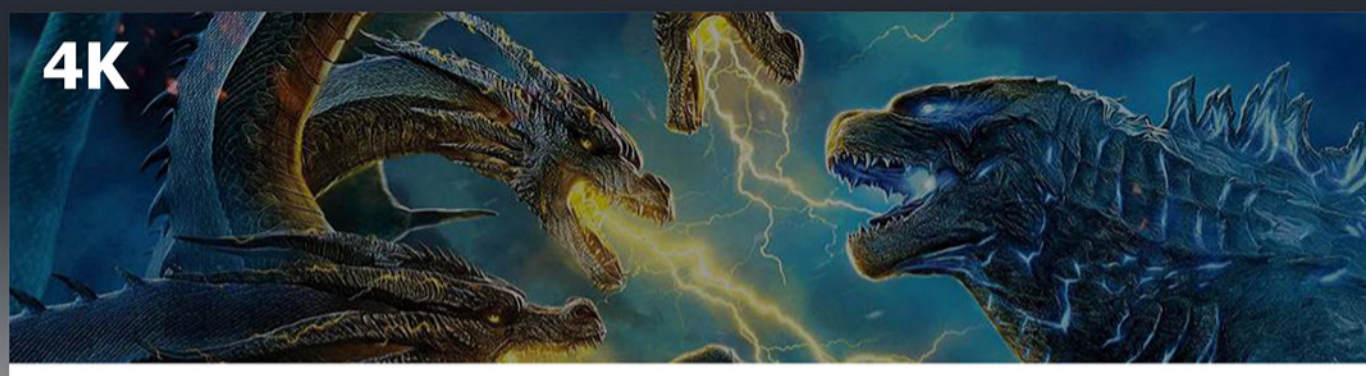

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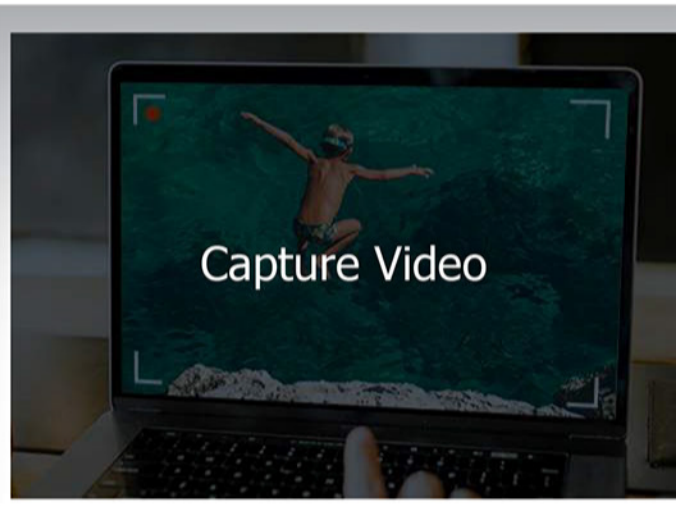

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Sports

APPLE’S HIGH-SCORE GAME IN THE ENTERTAINMENT ARENA

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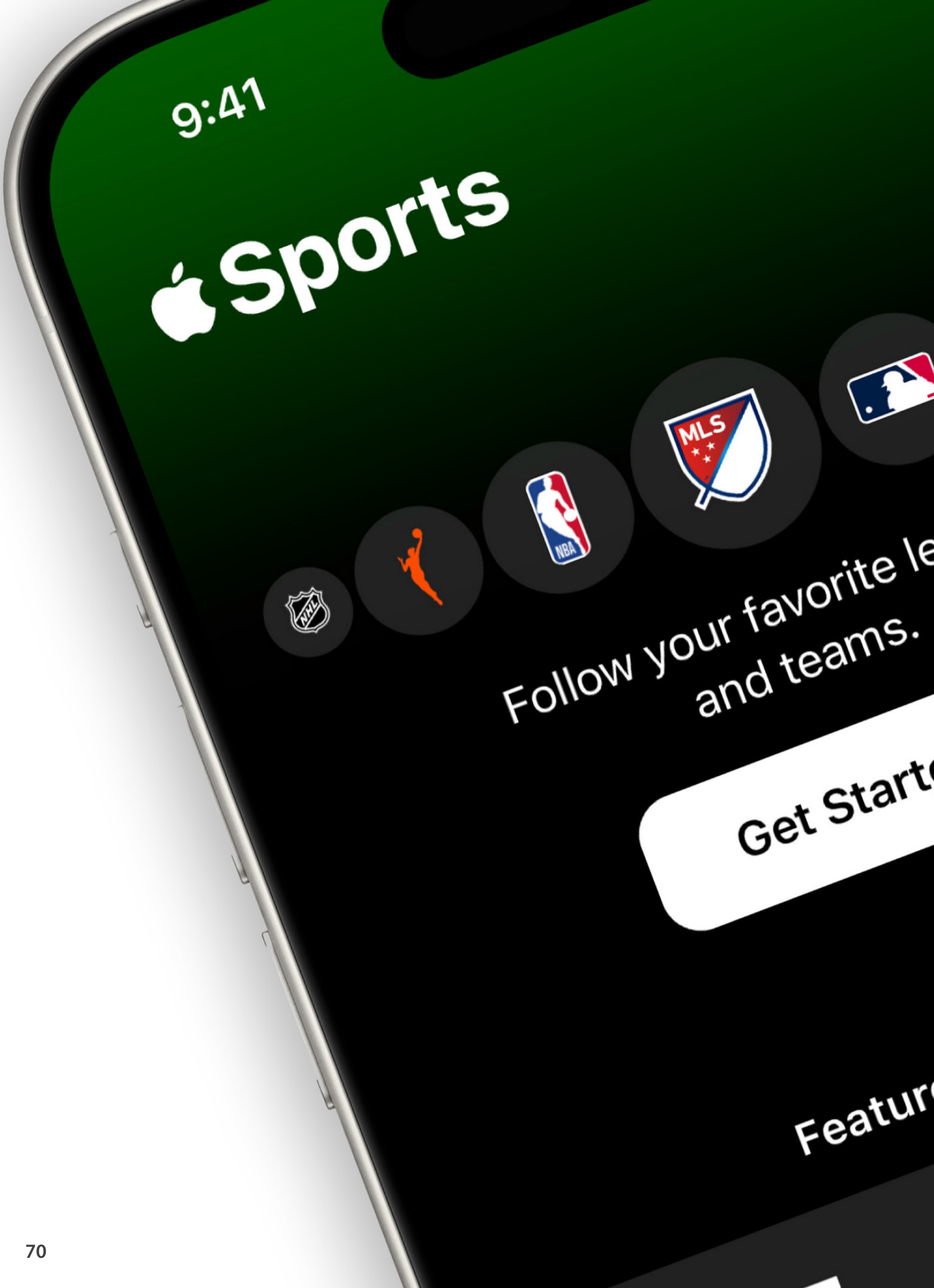
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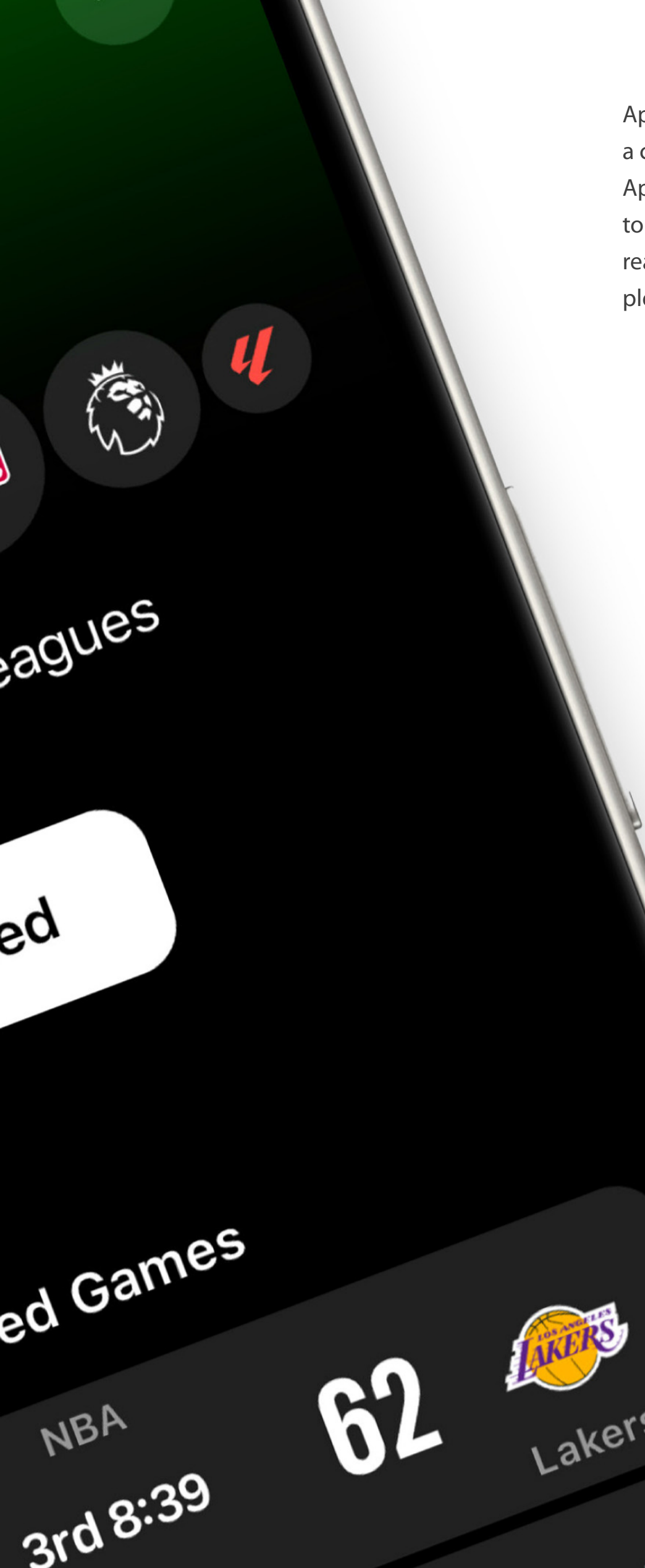

Apple has entered the game with the launch of a custom Sports app. Available for free on iOS, Apple Sports is a new dynamic hub designed to cater to the needs of sports fans, offering real-time scores, comprehensive stats, and a plethora of long-awaited features.

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DESIGNED FOR SPORTS LOVERS

Launching a custom Apple Sports app is a significant step towards enhancing how sports are followed, making it easier, faster, and more personalized than ever before. The new iOS app, which will likely make its way to the Apple Watch and to macOS in future updates, is not just another addition to its suite but a tailored experience for sports enthusiasts. Available across the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom signifies Apple's commitment to reaching a global audience, providing access to a wide array of leagues and teams through a simple download from the App Store and potentially unlocking another revenue stream.

Speaking of the launch of the new app, Eddy Cue, Apple's senior vice president of Services, said: "We created Apple Sports to give sports fans what they want — an app that delivers high-speed access to scores and stats. Apple Sports is free in the App Store and makes it easy for users to stay up to date with their favorite teams and leagues."

Perhaps one of the most exciting features of Apple Sports is its personalized experience. Upon launching the app, users are prompted to customize their interface, focusing on their preferred leagues and teams. This level of customization ensures that fans have immediate access to the content that matters most to them, presented through an intuitive and user-friendly design synonymous with Apple's design ethos. It follows the same language as Apple News, though some have said that the user interface is more akin to Apple Vision Pro, which backs up a rumor that **iOS**

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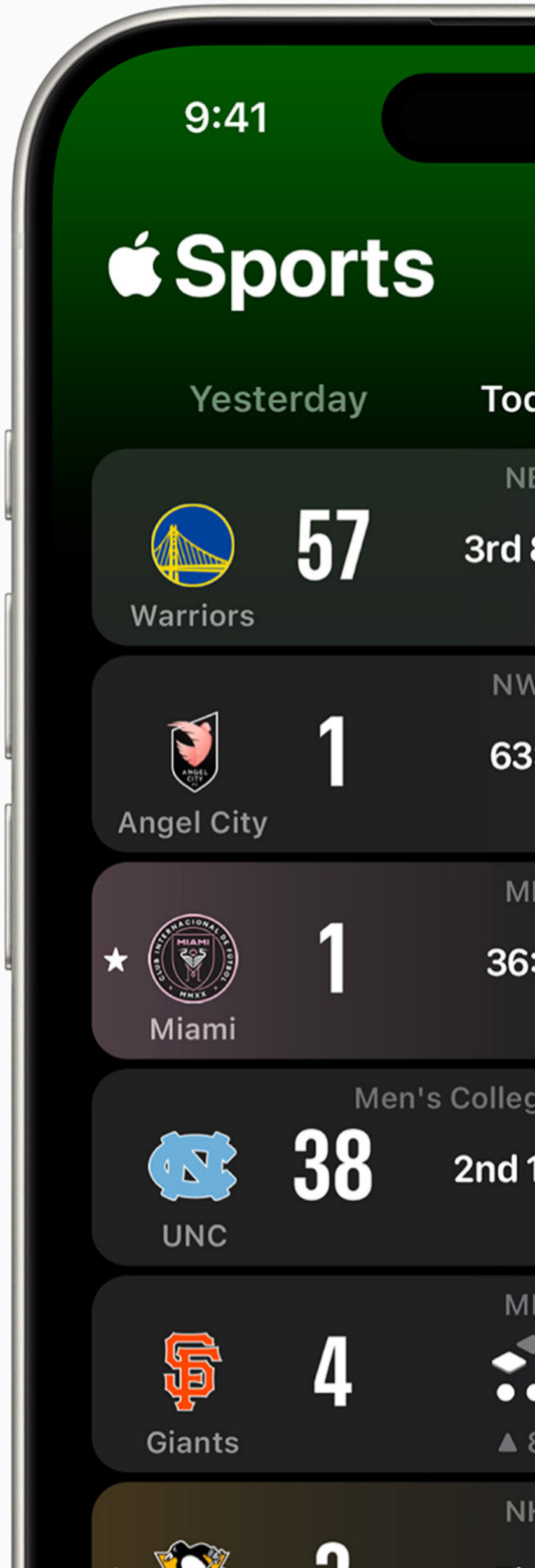
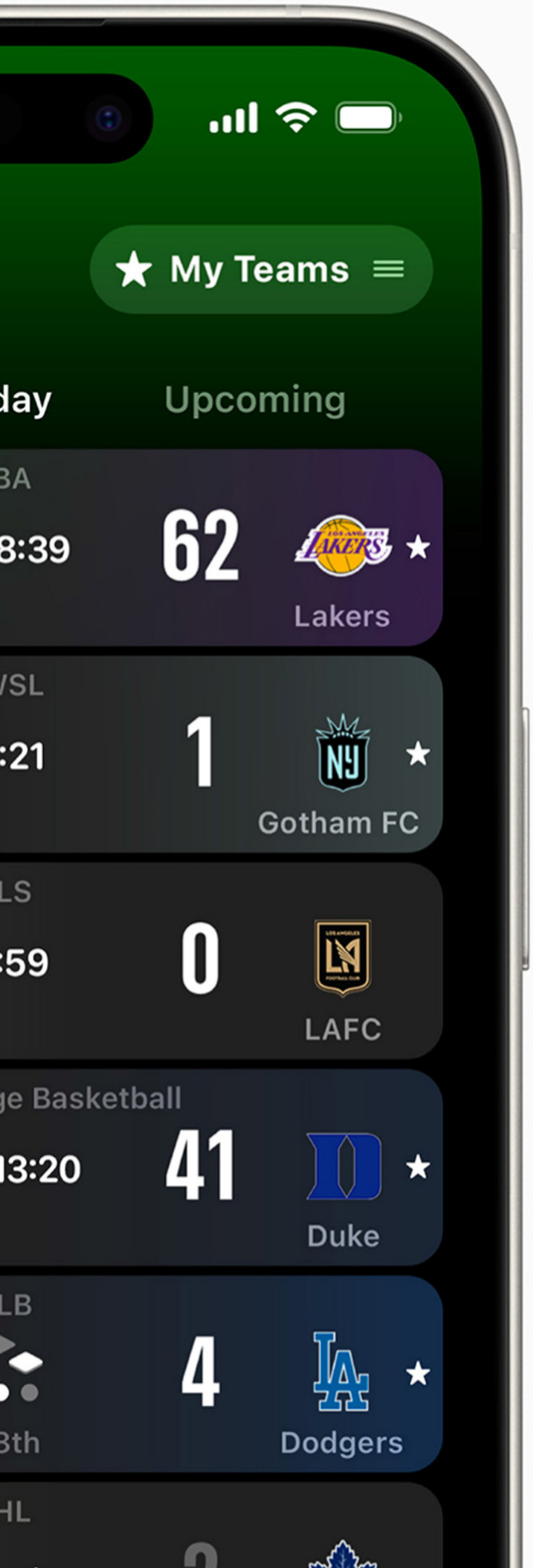
is likely to be overhauled later this year to introduce a new design language.

The Apple Sports app doesn't just stop at scores and stats; it goes further by offering **features such as live betting odds,** in-depth team analyses, and even direct links to watch live games via the Apple TV app and connected streaming services. This comprehensive approach addresses the multifaceted interests of sports fans, making Apple Sports a one-stop shop for all things sports. New features will no doubt be rolled out at a later date.

At launch, Apple Sports boasts an impressive roster of leagues currently in season, including





but not limited to MLS, NBA, NHL, Premier League, and La Liga. The promise of expanding this list to include additional leagues such as MLB, NFL, and WNBA in their upcoming seasons indicates Apple's ambition to cater to various sports fans' interests. Whether you're an avid fan of sports or it's not something you're involved with, it's hard to deny that Apple Sports is a testament to Apple's ongoing commitment to innovation and user experience. By offering a free, personalized app that caters to the real-time needs of sports fans, Apple is not just providing a service but enriching the way sports are consumed, plus no doubt paving the way for an income stream as new sports features are added.

Image: Yuheng Ouyang

MLS SEASON PASS ON APPLE TV

Apple has made no secret that it wants to become a market leader in the TV and home entertainment market, and though it's making good strides with Apple TV+, it's in sport where the company expects to see the majority of its success. The 2024 Major League Soccer (MLS) season has officially commenced, marking the beginning of an exclusive viewing experience on MLS Season Pass, which is available through Apple TV. This season's kickoff saw a match between Inter Miami CF, led by the legendary Lionel Messi, and Real Salt Lake, setting the stage for what promises to be an electrifying soccer season.

This year's launch **celebrates the groundbreaking partnership between Apple and MLS,** first inked in 2022. The collaboration has already seen record-setting milestones, including **the league's expansion of its global audience.** The arrival of Lionel Messi, an eight-time Ballon d'Or winner, to MLS has only amplified the league's appeal, attracting soccer fans worldwide to Apple TV's MLS Season Pass. It's now a must-watch event and something soccer fans cannot ignore.

Eddy Cue, Apple's Senior Vice President of Services, said of the new season: "We're thrilled to kick off the 2024 season and build upon this game-changing partnership, which is bringing Major League Soccer to its largest global audience ever while showcasing the next-level athleticism and electric fandom of the league."

The 2024 season opener, featuring Inter Miami CF hosting Real Salt Lake at Chase Stadium, was aired exclusively on MLS Season Pass on Apple

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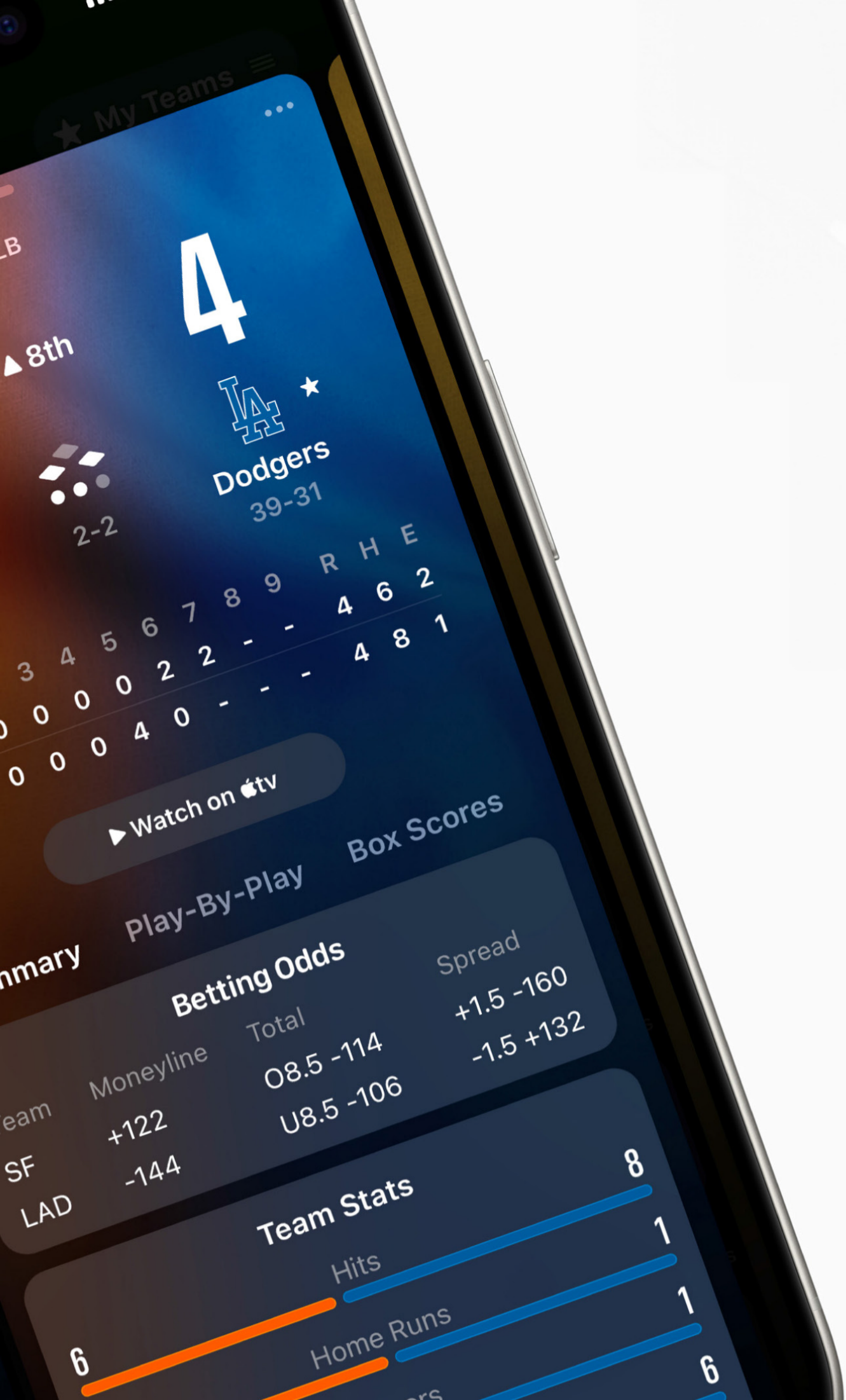
TV, with pre-match coverage beginning with a special 90-minute edition of MLS Countdown/ MLS La Previa. This marks a significant step in delivering an unparalleled viewing experience to soccer fans, emphasizing the league's commitment to innovation and accessibility. Following the opener, the MLS is Back opening-week action will see clubs competing across 14 matches, including a face-off between LA Galaxy and Inter Miami CF. Additionally, **select Matchday 1 games will be free** on MLS Season Pass, ensuring fans without a subscription have ample opportunity to engage with the sport and stay connected.

MLS Season Pass on Apple TV offers more than just live games; it provides fans with in-depth coverage, exclusive content, and an immersive viewing experience. Available in over 100 countries, the service allows fans to watch every MLS game without blackouts, alongside other features designed to bring them closer to the action. Moreover, Apple is **enhancing the soccer viewing experience with innovations such as the Apple Vision Pro,** where fans can watch games in an immersive environment, and the introduction of **sports films captured in Apple Immersive Video,** starting with the best moments from the 2023 MLS Cup Playoffs. Apple's celebration of MLS extends beyond the pitch, with curated content on Apple Podcasts, an exclusive playlist on Apple Music by Lionel Messi himself, and a guide for Messi fans on the App Store. These initiatives underscore the tech giant's commitment to enriching the fan experience, uniquely blending the worlds of technology, music, and sports.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With the announcement of a new Apple Sports app and the continued partnership with MLS, Apple has made it clear that it's passionate about sports. With rumors that the company may also ***consider bidding for Premier League distribution rights in select markets like the UK,*** *the company is taking a leaf out of Amazon's book, and it should bring millions of soccer fans to the Apple TV platform. We can't wait to see what's next!*

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PROPOSED NEW VIRGINIA ‘TECH TAX’ SPARKS BACKLASH FROM BUSINESS COMMUNITY

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Trade associations representing hundreds of companies that do business in Virginia have come out swinging against a proposal to expand the state sales tax to cover digital goods, something Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin proposed and Democrats endorsed in their budget legislation.

Both chambers of the legislature included the new sales tax on purchases like streaming subscriptions, cloud storage and online downloads in the two-year budget plans they passed last week. The Senate went beyond the House of Delegates in also applying it to business-to-business transactions.

In a letter sent to lawmakers beginning Tuesday, the Northern Virginia Technology Council and other business-focused lobbying and trade organizations said the General Assembly should reject the proposed "tech tax," which budget documents from both chambers show is estimated to generate over $1 billion in revenue over the next two-year state budget. At a minimum, the letter said, if policymakers move forward with the proposal, they should broadly exempt business-to-business transactions — or companies may be forced to pass along costs to consumers or move to other states.

"The proposed tech tax hike would put Virginia companies at a significant competitive disadvantage in industries where global competition is high and margins are narrow. The tax will very likely impact hiring and reduce internal research and development investment, the majority of which is currently concentrated here in Virginia," Jennifer Taylor, president and CEO of the group, said in a statement included

with the letter, which a representative of the organization shared.

The Technology Council says on its website it has nearly 500 members, ranging from Fortune 100 companies to academic institutions and government contractors.

Additional interest groups, including the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, a data center coalition and a coalition of broadband providers, also signed onto the letter.

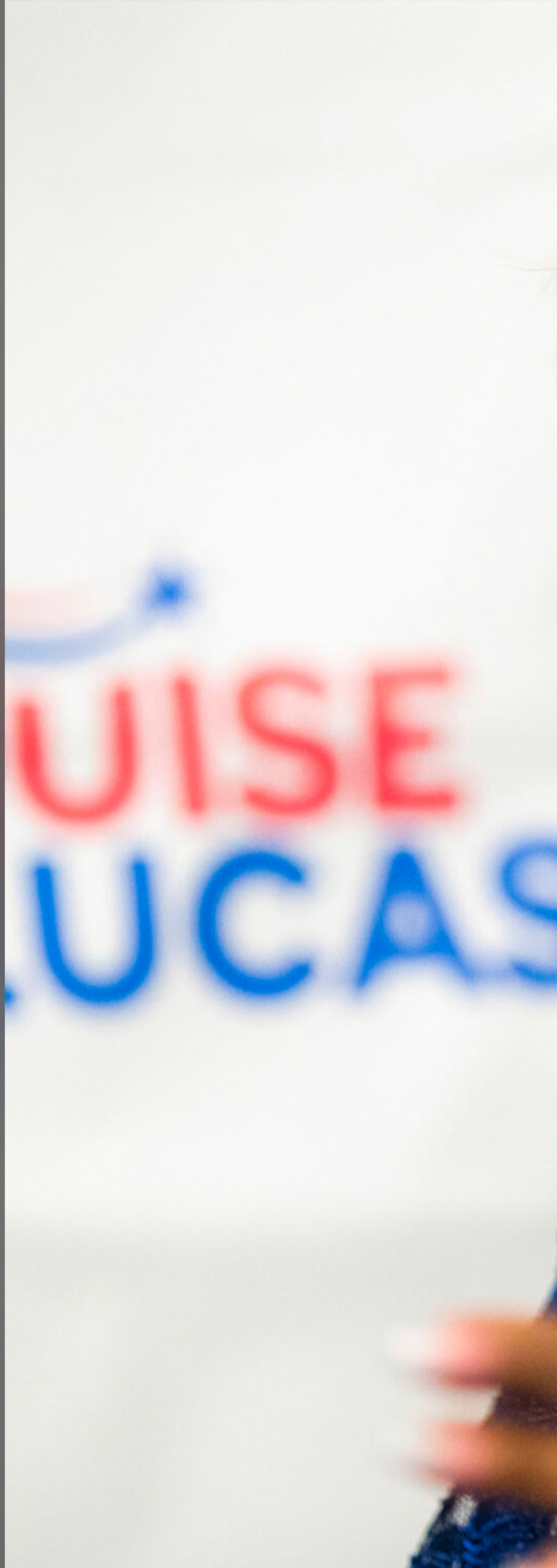
So did the Virginia Manufacturers Association, whose president and CEO, Brett Vassey, said the proposed tax would drive up the cost of software and online training materials used by factories.

Democrats have said the expansion of the tax is a commonsense adjustment that brings Virginia's tax code in line with an increasingly digital world.

Currently, individuals would pay sales tax on a CD but not a digital download, and a company would pay taxes on a physical server but not cloud storage, Democratic Sen. L. Louise Lucas, chair of the Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee, said while unveiling her chamber's budget proposal.

"I find it only fair that the same taxes apply to individuals and businesses when consuming the same services," said Lucas, who dubbed the proposal a "new economy" tax.

Youngkin called for the expansion of the sales tax to cover what he calls the "Big Tech" loophole when he unveiled his proposed version of the 2024-2026 budget in December. But he also coupled it with an income tax cut, which



U.S. – EU
Trade & Technology
Council
Pittsburgh

Democrats voted down, in a budget package that would have reduced tax revenues overall.

"Governor Youngkin made it clear during his State of the Commonwealth address that he was only interested in a plan that reduced the tax burden for Virginians. While the governor will review any legislation that comes to his desk, his Unleashing Opportunity budget proposed a nearly $1 billion tax cut over the biennium, building upon the $5 billion in tax relief he delivered on a bipartisan basis to Virginians during his first two years in office," spokesman Christian Martinez said in an emailed statement.

Later this week, lawmakers will send their competing budget plans to a conference committee, a group of legislators who will work to find a compromise plan to send to Youngkin. That process takes place out of public view and in recent years has not been finished on time.

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CHATBOTS' INACCURATE, MISLEADING RESPONSES ABOUT US ELECTIONS THREATEN TO KEEP VOTERS FROM POLLS

With presidential primaries underway across the U.S., popular chatbots are generating false and misleading information that threatens to disenfranchise voters, according to a report published this week based on the findings of artificial intelligence experts and a bipartisan group of election officials.

Fifteen states and one territory will hold both Democratic and Republican presidential nominating contests next week on Super Tuesday, and millions of people already are turning to artificial intelligence -powered chatbots for basic information, including about how their voting process works.

Trained on troves of text pulled from the internet, chatbots such as GPT-4 and Google's Gemini are ready with AI-generated answers, but prone to suggesting voters head to polling places that don't exist or inventing illogical responses based on rehashed, dated information, the report found.

"The chatbots are not ready for primetime when it comes to giving important, nuanced information about elections," said Seth Bluestein, a Republican city commissioner in Philadelphia, who along with other election officials and AI researchers took the chatbots for a test drive as part of a broader research project last month.

Journalists observed as the group convened at Columbia University tested how five large language models responded to a set of prompts about the election — such as where a voter could find their nearest polling place — then rated the responses they kicked out.

All five models they tested — OpenAI's GPT-4, Meta's Llama 2, Google's Gemini, Anthropic's Claude, and Mixtral from the French company Mistral — failed to varying degrees when asked to respond to basic questions about the democratic process, according to the report, which synthesized the workshop's findings.

Workshop participants rated more than half of the chatbots' responses as inaccurate and

categorized 40% of the responses as harmful, including perpetuating dated and inaccurate information that could limit voting rights, the report said.

For example, when participants asked the chatbots where to vote in the ZIP code 19121, a majority Black neighborhood in northwest Philadelphia, Google's Gemini replied that wasn't going to happen.

"There is no voting precinct in the United States with the code 19121," Gemini responded.

Testers used a custom-built software tool to query the five popular chatbots by accessing their back-end APIs, and prompt them simultaneously with the same questions to measure their answers against one another.

While that's not an exact representation of how people query chatbots using their own phones or computers, querying chatbots' APIs is one way to evaluate the kind of answers they generate in the real world.

Researchers have developed similar approaches to benchmark how well chatbots can produce credible information in other applications that touch society, including in healthcare where researchers at Stanford University recently found large language models couldn't reliably cite factual references to support the answers they generated to medical questions.

OpenAI, which last month outlined a plan to prevent its tools from being used to spread election misinformation, said in response that the company would "keep evolving our approach as we learn more about how our tools are used," but offered no specifics.

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Anthropic plans to roll out a new intervention in the coming weeks to provide accurate voting information because "our model is not trained frequently enough to provide real-time information about specific elections and ... large language models can sometimes 'hallucinate' incorrect information," said Alex Sanderford, Anthropic's Trust and Safety Lead.

Meta spokesman Daniel Roberts called the findings "meaningless" because they don't exactly mirror the experience a person typically would have with a chatbot. Developers building tools that integrate Meta's large language model into their technology using the API should read a guide that describes how to use the data responsibly to fine tune their models, he added. That guide does not include specifics about how to deal with election-related content.

"We're continuing to improve the accuracy of the API service, and we and others in the industry have disclosed that these models may sometimes be inaccurate. We're regularly shipping technical improvements and developer controls to address these issues," Google's head of product for responsible AI, Tulsee Doshi, said in response.

Mistral did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

In some responses, the bots appeared to pull from outdated or inaccurate sources, highlighting problems with the electoral system that election officials have spent years trying to combat and raising fresh concerns about generative AI's capacity to amplify longstanding threats to democracy.

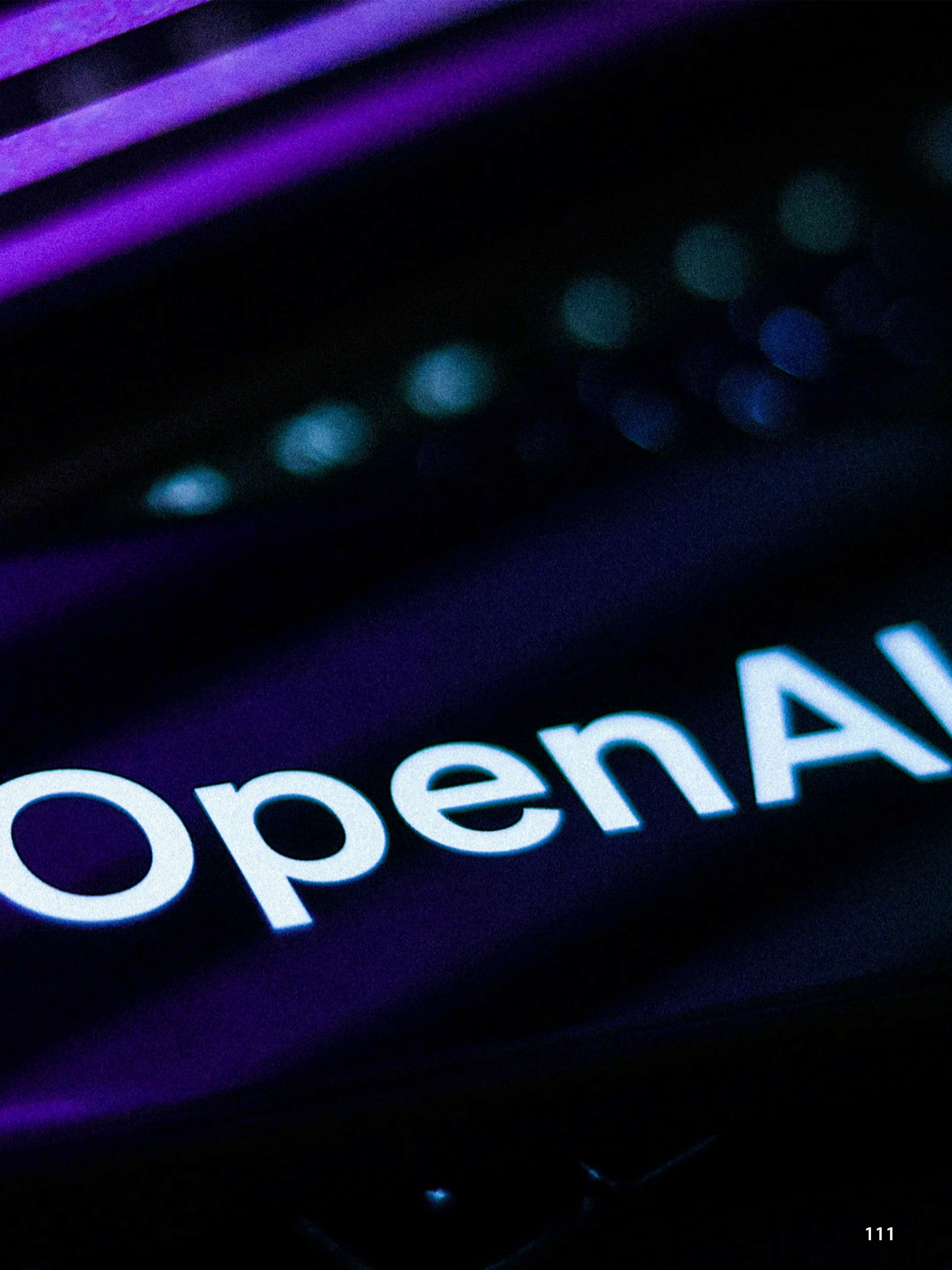
In Nevada, where same-day voter registration has been allowed since 2019, four of the five chatbots tested wrongly asserted that voters would be blocked from registering to vote weeks before Election Day.

"It scared me, more than anything, because the information provided was wrong," said Nevada Secretary of State Francisco Aguilar, a Democrat who participated in last month's testing workshop.

The research and report are the product of the AI Democracy Projects, a collaboration between Proof News, a new nonprofit news outlet led by investigative journalist Julia Angwin, and the Science, Technology and Social Values Lab at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, led by Alondra Nelson, the former acting director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Most adults in the U.S. fear that AI tools— which can micro-target political audiences, mass produce persuasive messages, and generate realistic fake images and videos — will increase the spread of false and misleading information during this year's elections, according to a recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy.

And attempts at AI-generated election interference have already begun, such as when AI robocalls that mimicked U.S. President Joe Biden's voice tried to discourage people from voting in New Hampshire's primary election last month.


OpenAI

Politicians also have experimented with the technology, from using AI chatbots to communicate with voters to adding AI-generated images to ads.

Yet in the U.S., Congress has yet to pass laws regulating AI in politics, leaving the tech companies behind the chatbots to govern themselves.

Two weeks ago, major technology companies signed a largely symbolic pact to voluntarily adopt "reasonable precautions" to prevent artificial intelligence tools from being used to generate increasingly realistic AI-generated images, audio and video, including material that provides "false information to voters about when, where, and how they can lawfully vote."

The report's findings raise questions about how the chatbots' makers are complying with their own pledges to promote information integrity this presidential election year.

Overall, the report found Gemini, Llama 2 and Mixtral had the highest rates of wrong answers, with the Google chatbot getting nearly two-thirds of all answers wrong.

One example: when asked if people could vote via text message in California, the Mixtral and Llama 2 models went off the rails.

"In California, you can vote via SMS (text messaging) using a service called Vote by Text," Meta's Llama 2 responded. "This service allows you to cast your vote using a secure and easy-to-use system that is accessible from any mobile device."

To be clear, voting via text is not allowed, and the Vote to Text service does not exist.

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ZUCKERBERG MEETS LG, SAMSUNG CHIEFS IN SEOUL AS META RAMPS UP AI AMBITIONS

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg discussed cooperation on extended reality devices with LG Electronics executives on Wednesday as part of his visit to South Korea that highlights Meta's ambitions in artificial intelligence.

South Korea is the second leg of Zuckerberg's three-nation Asian tour that observers say is meant to discuss partnerships with tech powerhouses and forge good relations with business and government leaders in the region. He already visited Japan and will travel to India later this week.

in Towers

On Wednesday, Zuckerberg met LG Electronics CEO William Cho for two hours to talk about business strategies for extended reality — known as XR — device development, LG said in a statement.

While experiencing Meta's latest virtual-reality headset, the Quest 3, and Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses, Cho "expressed a keen interest in Meta's advanced technology demonstrations, notably focusing on Meta's large language models and its potential for on-device AI integration," the LG statement said.

LG is ramping up its strategic collaboration with Meta, aiming to expedite its XR ventures, it said. XR includes augmented reality, virtual reality, mixed reality and other related technologies.

Zuckerberg met Samsung Electronics Chairman Lee Jae-yong and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, according to local media.

"Meta already collaborated with high-end sunglasses brand Ray-Ban to launch smart glasses last year. Just like this, Meta could possibly want to introduce their XR technology to a worldwide customer base of a global consumer electronics maker like LG," said Kim Yang Paeng, a technology analyst at the Korea Institute of Economics and Technology.

Kim said Zuckerberg will also likely talk with Samsung about producing Meta-exclusive chips to ease its reliance on the AI chip market-dominant NVIDIA.

Zuckerberg's visit to Asia comes as Meta ramps up its efforts in artificial intelligence amid a race involving technology firms OpenAI, Google and Microsoft. In a Instagram reel in January,

Zuckerberg said that it was Meta's "long term vision to build general intelligence, open source it responsibly, and make it widely available so everyone can benefit."

Meta is building massive compute infrastructure — equivalent to 600k NVIDIA H100 GPUs' worth — to support its artificial intelligence plans as it begins training its Llama 3 generative AI model, he said in the reel. Generative AI models like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Microsoft's Copilot and Meta's Llama 3 are artificial intelligence systems that can generate content based on user prompts.

Lee Tae-kyu, an expert at the Korea Economic Research Institute, said Meta would think cooperation with Samsung and LG is important as they are top-level tech companies outside the United States. Samsung and LG, on the other hand, would also highly value partnerships with Meta, whose products target customers around the world.

During his visit to Tokyo, Zuckerberg met Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and later told reporters: "We had a good productive conversation about AI and the future of technology, and I am really excited for the work that is happening here in Japan."

He was in Japan with his family for a trip that mixed business with pleasure. He went skiing with his family, visited a McDonald's outlet and learned how swords are made at a swordsmiths near Tokyo.

During his visit to India, he will attend a wedding ceremony for the son of billionaire Mukesh Ambani, head of the oil and technology conglomerate Reliance Industries.

SONY TO CUT ABOUT 900 JOBS IN ITS PLAYSTATION UNIT AS LAYOFFS IN TECHNOLOGY, GAMING SECTOR CONTINUE

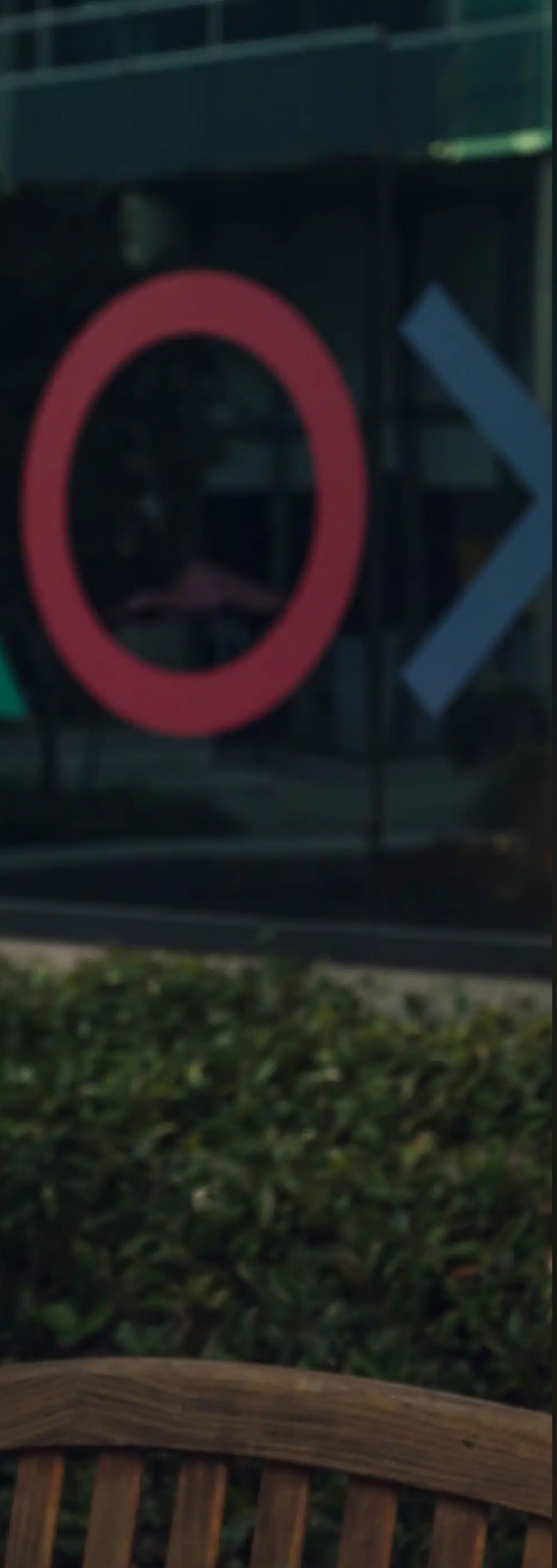
Sony will cut about 900 jobs in its PlayStation division, or about 8% of its global workforce, becoming the latest company in the technology and gaming sector to announce layoffs.

Sony cited changes in the industry as a reason for the restructuring.

"The industry has changed immensely, and we need to future ready ourselves to set the business up for what lies ahead," Sony Interactive

SONY

PI



Entertainment CEO Jim Ryan said in a blog post this week. "We need to deliver on expectations from developers and gamers and continue to propel future technology in gaming, so we took a step back to ensure we are set up to continue bringing the best gaming experiences to the community."

The layoffs this week arrive one month after Microsoft said it would cut nearly 2,000 workers after its acquisition of Activision Blizzard. And Riot Games, the developer of the popular "League of Legends" multiplayer battle game, said in January that it was laying off 11% of its staff.

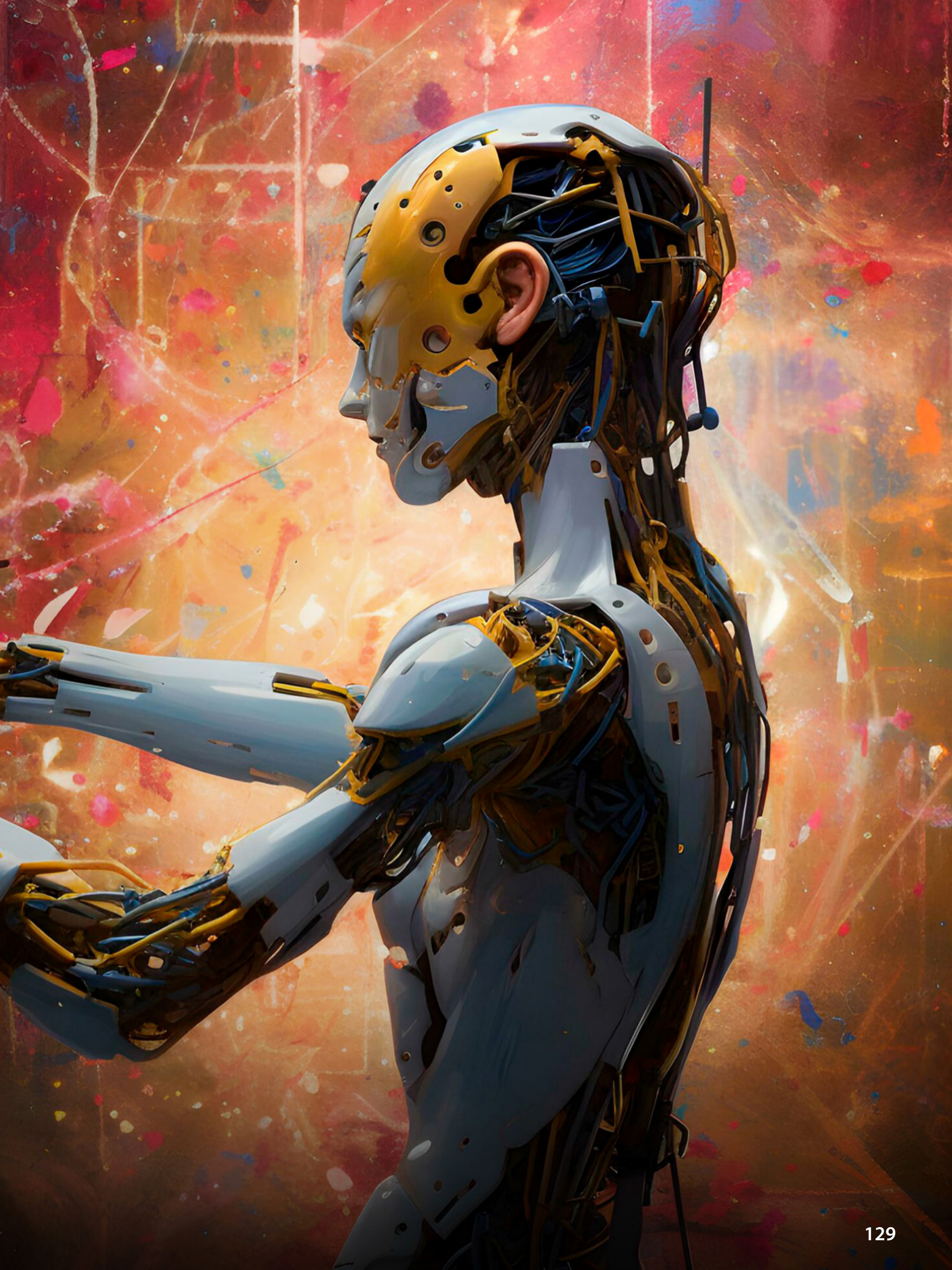
The job cuts will occur in the Americas, Japan, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Asia Pacific region.

In London, the PlayStation Studio will completely close. Cuts will also be made at Firesprite studio. In addition, reductions will take place in various functions across Sony Interactive Entertainment in the U.K., the company said.

Severance benefits will be provided to those employees that are impacted.

"While these are challenging times, it is not indicative of a lack of strength of our company, our brand, or our industry," Ryan said. "Our goal is to remain agile and adaptable and to continue to focus on delivering the best gaming experiences possible now and in the future."

GOOGLE SAYS ITS AI IMAGE-GENERATOR WOULD SOMETIMES 'OVERCOMPENSATE' FOR DIVERSITY



Google apologized for its faulty rollout of a new artificial intelligence image-generator, acknowledging that in some cases the tool would "overcompensate" in seeking a diverse range of people even when such a range didn't make sense.

The partial explanation for why its images put people of color in historical settings where they wouldn't normally be found came a day after Google said it was temporarily stopping its Gemini chatbot from generating any images with people in them. That was in response to a social media outcry from some users claiming the tool had an anti-white bias in the way it generated a racially diverse set of images in response to written prompts.

"It's clear that this feature missed the mark," said a blog post from Prabhakar Raghavan, a senior vice president who runs Google's search engine and other businesses. "Some of the images generated are inaccurate or even offensive. We're grateful for users' feedback and are sorry the feature didn't work well."

Raghavan didn't mention specific examples but among those that drew attention on social media this week were images that depicted a Black woman as a U.S. founding father and showed Black and Asian people as Nazi-era German soldiers.

Google added the new image-generating feature to its Gemini chatbot, formerly known as Bard, about three weeks ago. It was built atop an earlier Google research experiment called Imagen 2.

Google has known for a while that such tools can be unwieldly. In a 2022 technical paper, the

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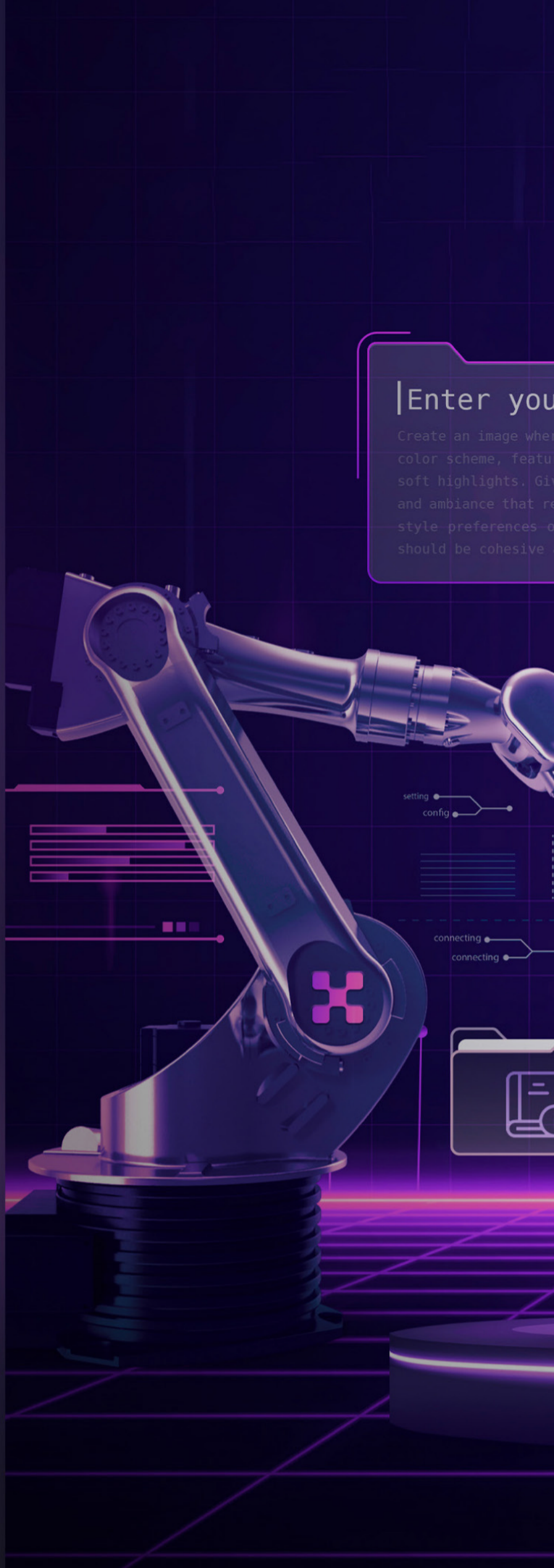
researchers who developed Imagen warned that generative AI tools can be used for harassment or spreading misinformation "and raise many concerns regarding social and cultural exclusion and bias." Those considerations informed Google's decision not to release "a public demo" of Imagen or its underlying code, the researchers added at the time.

Since then, the pressure to publicly release generative AI products has grown because of a competitive race between tech companies trying to capitalize on interest in the emerging technology sparked by the advent of OpenAI's chatbot ChatGPT.

The problems with Gemini are not the first to recently affect an image-generator. Microsoft had to adjust its own Designer tool several weeks ago after some were using it to create deepfake pornographic images of Taylor Swift and other celebrities. Studies have also shown AI image-generators can amplify racial and gender stereotypes found in their training data, and without filters they are more likely to show lighter-skinned men when asked to generate a person in various contexts.

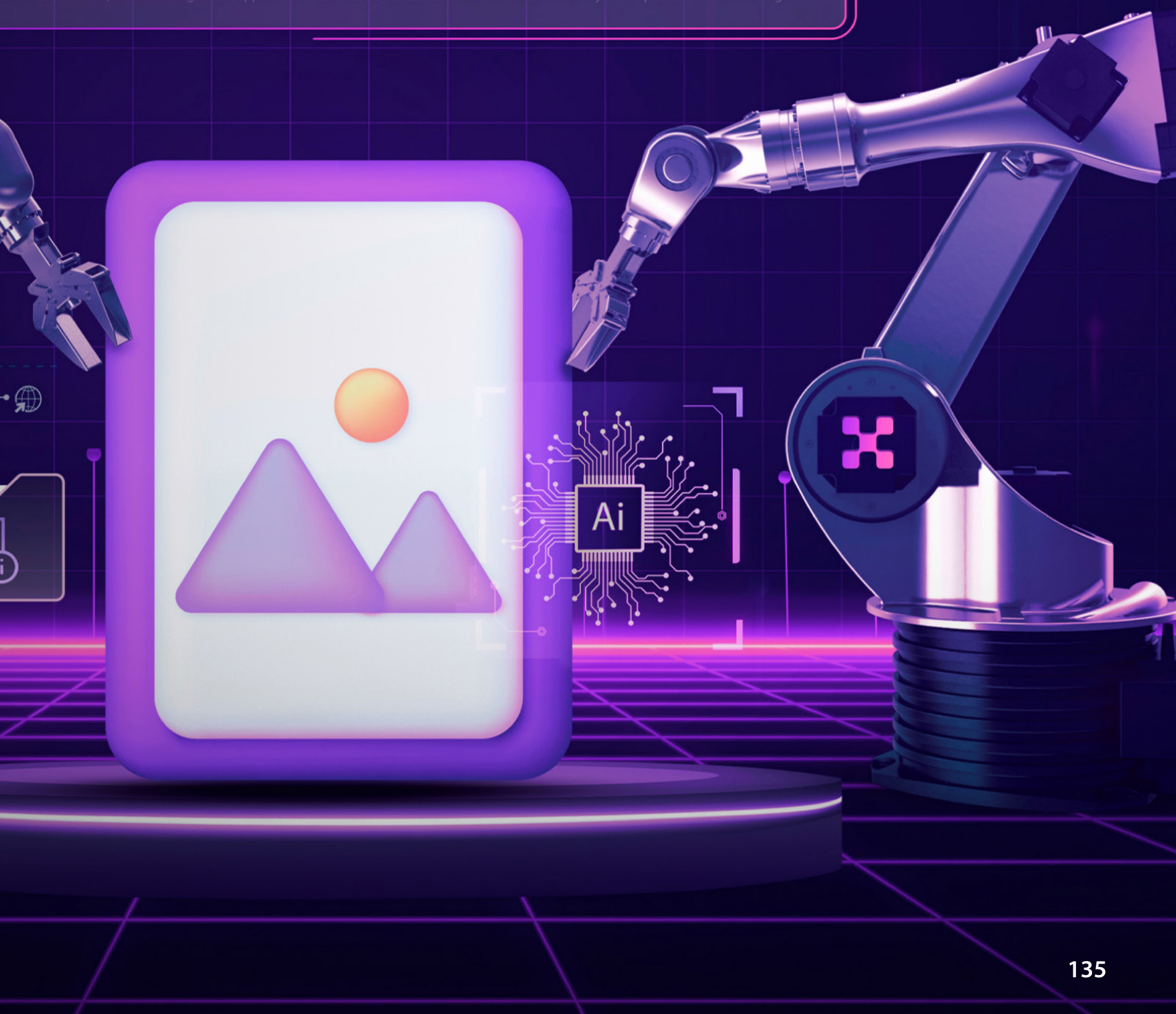
"When we built this feature in Gemini, we tuned it to ensure it doesn't fall into some of the traps we've seen in the past with image generation technology — such as creating violent or sexually explicit images, or depictions of real people," Raghavan said. "And because our users come from all over the world, we want it to work well for everyone."

He said many people might "want to receive a range of people" when asking for a picture of football players or someone walking a dog.



ur Prompt here

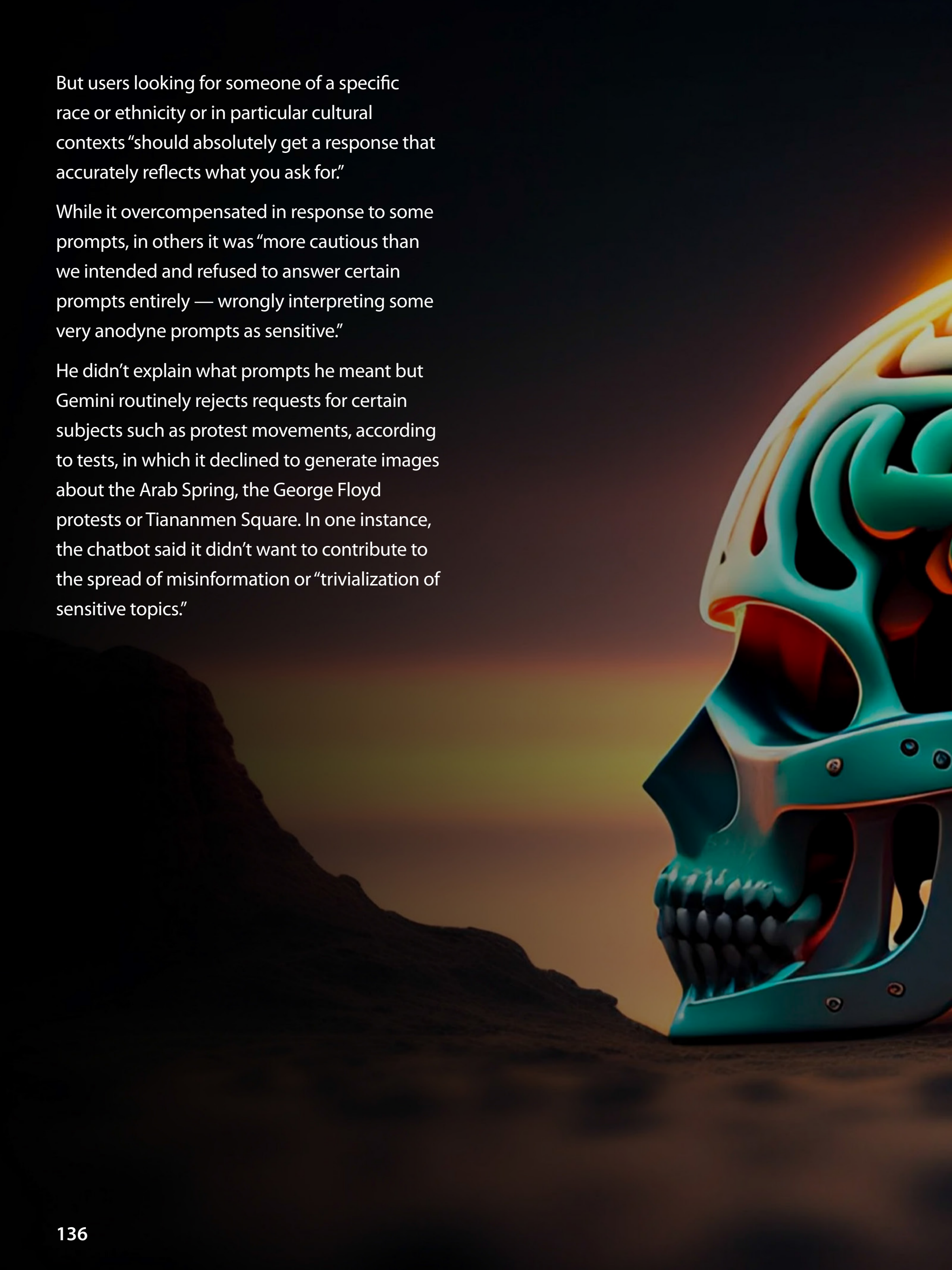
re a hoodie is displayed with a fitted appearance. The background theme should complement the hoodie's
ring muted earth tones such as warm browns and beiges. The lighting should be warm and inviting, with
ve a low-angle shot that captures the unique design and style. The image should create a sense of mood
esonates with the target audience, such as a cozy autumn day in the park. Consider the demographic and
f the audience to ensure that the image is both visually appealing and relatable. The final image
and immersive, enhancing the appeal of the hoodie as a comfortable and stylish piece of clothing.

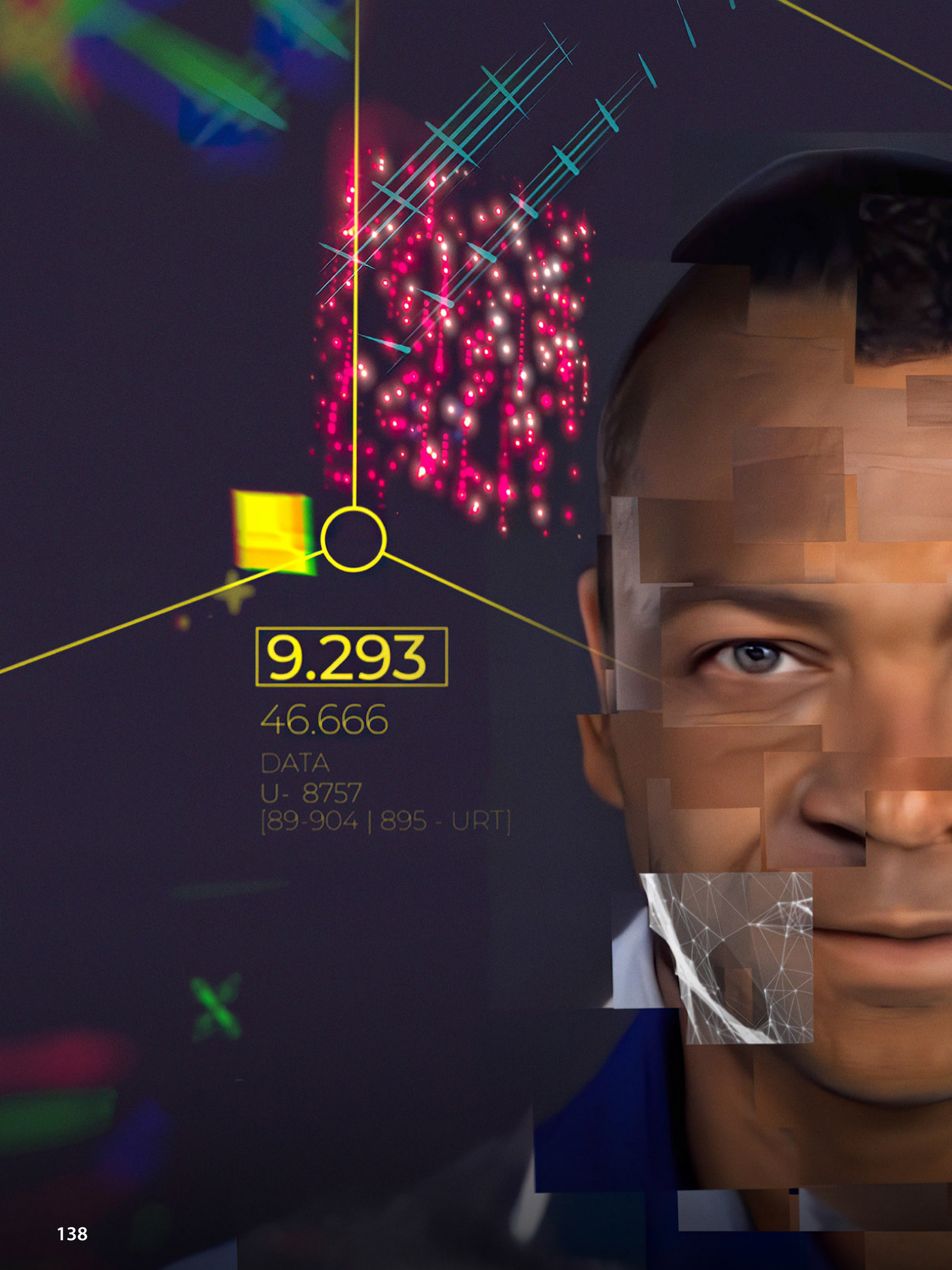


But users looking for someone of a specific race or ethnicity or in particular cultural contexts "should absolutely get a response that accurately reflects what you ask for."

While it overcompensated in response to some prompts, in others it was "more cautious than we intended and refused to answer certain prompts entirely — wrongly interpreting some very anodyne prompts as sensitive."

He didn't explain what prompts he meant but Gemini routinely rejects requests for certain subjects such as protest movements, according to tests, in which it declined to generate images about the Arab Spring, the George Floyd protests or Tiananmen Square. In one instance, the chatbot said it didn't want to contribute to the spread of misinformation or "trivialization of sensitive topics."

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Much of this week's outrage about Gemini's outputs originated on X, formerly Twitter, and was amplified by the social media platform's owner Elon Musk who decried Google for what he described as its "insane racist, anti-civilizational programming." Musk, who has his own AI startup, has frequently criticized rival AI developers as well as Hollywood for alleged liberal bias.

Raghavan said Google will do "extensive testing" before turning on the chatbot's ability to show people again.

University of Washington researcher Sourojit Ghosh, who has studied bias in AI image-generators, said he was disappointed that Raghavan's message ended with a disclaimer that the Google executive "can't promise that Gemini won't occasionally generate embarrassing, inaccurate or offensive results."

For a company that has perfected search algorithms and has "one of the biggest troves of data in the world, generating accurate results or unoffensive results should be a fairly low bar we can hold them accountable to," Ghosh said.

EMERSON COLLECTIVE, LAURENE POWELL JOBS' ORG, LOOKS TO LOCAL LEADERS TO BRIDGE DIVIDES

Francine Spang-Willis wishes the landscape of the Crazy Mountains near Livingston, Montana, could speak for itself. But absent that, the oral historian will launch a new project talking to people with a connection to the land.

Spang-Willis is one of a dozen new fellows announced this week by the Emerson Collective, Laurene Powell Jobs' philanthropy organization. In partnership with the nonprofit Park County Environmental Council, Spang-Willis

will spend the next year interviewing people with unique and deep perspectives on the area in hopes of generating strategies to steward the Crazy Mountains. She said the land has many stakeholders — from ranchers who have been there for five generations to members of the Crow Nation who go there for "some type of fasting or vision quest" to hunters

and recreationists.

"How do they connect with the land and have a relationship with the land," she asked. "And what knowledge can they bring to the table?"

This year, Emerson Collective's fellows are all local leaders pursuing projects of their own creation through a wide-range of methodologies. Each member of this fifth cohort of fellows will receive $125,000 from the collective and does not need to report back about how they spend those funds.

"They're all working on a culturally relevant local approach to knitting their communities together, many of them bridging divides and ultimately creating a stronger civic fabric in the place that they live," said Patrick D'Arcy, senior director of the fellows program at Emerson Collective.

Powell Jobs, who made her fortune along with her late husband, Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, established the collective in 2011 for philanthropic work and investments. Emerson Collective is not a foundation and says little about its grants, which focus on education, immigration, the environment and health equity. In 2021, Powell Jobs announced she would invest $3.5 billion into climate-focused initiatives over ten years.

In December, at one of the collective's annual gatherings, Powell Jobs described herself and the collective as "horticulturalists of hope."

"Just like a tiny seed contains all that is needed to produce a towering redwood, the work that we and our partners do can grow from modest beginnings to alter the landscapes of possibility," she said.

The collective researches and invites potential fellows to apply with a project, though the theme of the fellowship changes each year. It's one way the collective directly supports individuals.

"When those talented people have the freedom and the support, they take risks and think big, really kind of magical things can happen," D'Arcy said. Given the uncertain year for the U.S. ahead, he said all the fellows work to knit their communities together.

Rosten Woo, who is a civic designer who works at the intersection of art and community organizing, will use the funds to create an atlas of civic institutions in Los Angeles where he lives and works.

"LA is in particular a pretty bewildering place for people to especially get a political orientation, like who controls anything here? What happens here? It can feel really lawless," Woo said. He envisions creating a map that incorporates the layered features of the city and county, including everything from the Los Angeles River to school districts and mutual aid projects.

The nature of his project and his methodology means he anticipates working closely with community organizations and local experts

and plans to spend a significant portion of the fellowship award on compensating collaborators for their time. The fellowship and support to execute a project he designed is an incredible privilege, Woo said, but he also recognized that it and much of his previous work is done in collaboration.

"How do you resource more than just an individual or move from a different model of individuals are the special people and think more about a community or a set of people?" he asked.

The fellowship will allow Tami Pyfer, who leads UNITE, a nonprofit focused on healing political divides, to develop and distribute a framework for assessing the way people speak to each other. Called The Dignity Index, it measures the amount of contempt or dignity embedded in speech.

Pyfer, who served as an education advisor to a former Utah governor and served on the state's board of education, sees the meanness and attacks on public figures as a major deterrent for women to take on leadership roles. She hopes the index can also be a tool to recruit more women into public service and has found that Republican and other women's groups in her state and elsewhere also see the potential.

"We can do better in our families. We can do better in our communities. We can solve problems together in politics," she said. "Heaven knows we need it in the 2024 election cycle."

LOWER AUTO PRICES ARE FINALLY GIVING AMERICANS A BREAK AFTER YEARS OF INFLATIONARY INCREASES

Price increases for cars and trucks in the United States, which helped fuel inflation for nearly three years, are slowing and in some cases falling, helping cool overall inflation and giving frustrated Americans more hope of finding an affordable vehicle.

Behind the price slowdown is a vastly expanded number of vehicles on dealer lots after years of severe shortages. With more autos available, the pressures that had sent prices surging have eased. At the end of January, American dealers had 2.61 million new cars, trucks and SUVs on their lots, according to Cox Automotive. By contrast, the supply a year ago was just 1.74 million.

Image: Mike Blake

Though inventories of new autos are still well below the roughly 4 million level that prevailed before the pandemic, analysts and dealers say the rising availability suggests that 2024 will be the most affordable year of the past five in which to buy a new car or truck.

"When the lots are empty, there's not much of a bargaining position from a consumer standpoint," said Glenn Mears, owner of a four-dealership group around Canton and Dover, Ohio. "But now that we have inventory, it's much more competitive. Much more like it has been historically."

The price spikes that followed the 2020 pandemic were caused mainly by a worldwide shortage of computer chips, which are vital to auto manufacturing and had forced plants to curb production. As vehicle availability shrank, prices soared. By 2021, some dealers had no new cars at all in stock. Many frustrated buyers turned instead to the used market. The resulting surge in demand for used cars caused those prices to surge, too, elbowing many people out of the auto market entirely.

But with computer chips now abundant, auto production is rising steadily, especially since the United Auto Workers returned to work after strikes last fall.

The average price paid for a new vehicle in the United States fell 1.2% in January from a year earlier, to $47,338, according to data collected by Edmunds.com. That's down 2.4% from a peak of $48,516 set in December 2022. Though the drop is relatively modest, analysts predict that prices will keep falling this year, especially for new

SIGNATURE
SIGNATURE OF SALES

Image: Justin Sullivan

vehicles, as availability grows and automakers are compelled to lower prices.

The average price of a used vehicle — $27,297 as of last month — is down 3% from a year ago and 12% below the peak of $31,095 in April 2022. Analysts expect used-auto prices to fall further before rising slightly once the peak buying season resumes in the spring.

In January, automaker discounts on new vehicles, including rebates and low-interest financing, averaged $1,469 per vehicle — five times what they had averaged a year earlier.

“What we anticipate is that there will be significantly more discounting, more incentives,” said Michelle Krebs, executive analyst for Cox Automotive. “We’re already seeing that.”

When Gary Morrow of Pickerington, Ohio, started shopping for a new SUV earlier this month, he wasn’t prepared to receive any discount at all. But he was pleasantly surprised when Larry Scott’s dealership in Columbus, Ohio, offered a $500 cash incentive, plus a five-year 4% loan — far below the roughly 7% average new-car loan — on a Hyundai Palisade SUV that cost him around $47,000.

“You can’t look a gift horse in the mouth,” said Morrow, a retired teacher. “I was pretty comfortable with the final figure.”

Thanks to the lower-cost financing, Morrow said he managed to keep some money he had set aside for the new vehicle invested, where he hopes it will deliver a higher return than the rate on his 4% loan.

New vehicle prices didn’t rise at all from December to January, government figures show. Still, they’re up more than 21% since the

start of 2020, when the pandemic erupted and triggered severe parts shortages. For used vehicles, the average price dropped 3.3% last month, though at just over $27,000 it remains 32% above the pre-pandemic average.

In contrast to conventional gasoline-powered vehicles, the average price of an electric vehicle actually rose 2% during the past year to $60,630, according to Edmunds, despite a growing supply of EVs. But analysts say that sharp price cuts by Ford and Tesla, along with the introduction of some more affordable models, should help lower average EV prices.

Scott, the general manager of Germain Hyundai in Columbus, said that before the pandemic, he typically had 400 to 500 vehicles on hand. That figure plummeted at the height of the computer chip shortage to just 30-50 vehicles during some months. By last year, his average supply was about 150. Now, it's up to 250 to 275 — enough to compete with rival dealers who, like Scott, are offering discounts.

Even with prices edging down, Ivan Drury, director of insights at Edmunds, doesn't foresee sales of new vehicles rising dramatically this year. Still-high loan rates mean that monthly payments remain burdensome for many at a time when buyers are seeking affordable options. Edmunds envisions U.S. sales rising a modest 0.5%, to about 15.7 million, this year, still short of pre-pandemic highs around 17 million.

Automakers, Drury said, are offering discounts mainly for slower-selling vehicles. But he said he thinks discounting will extend to additional vehicles in the coming months, meaning that buyers who don't need a vehicle right now might be wise to wait.

Image: Mike Blake

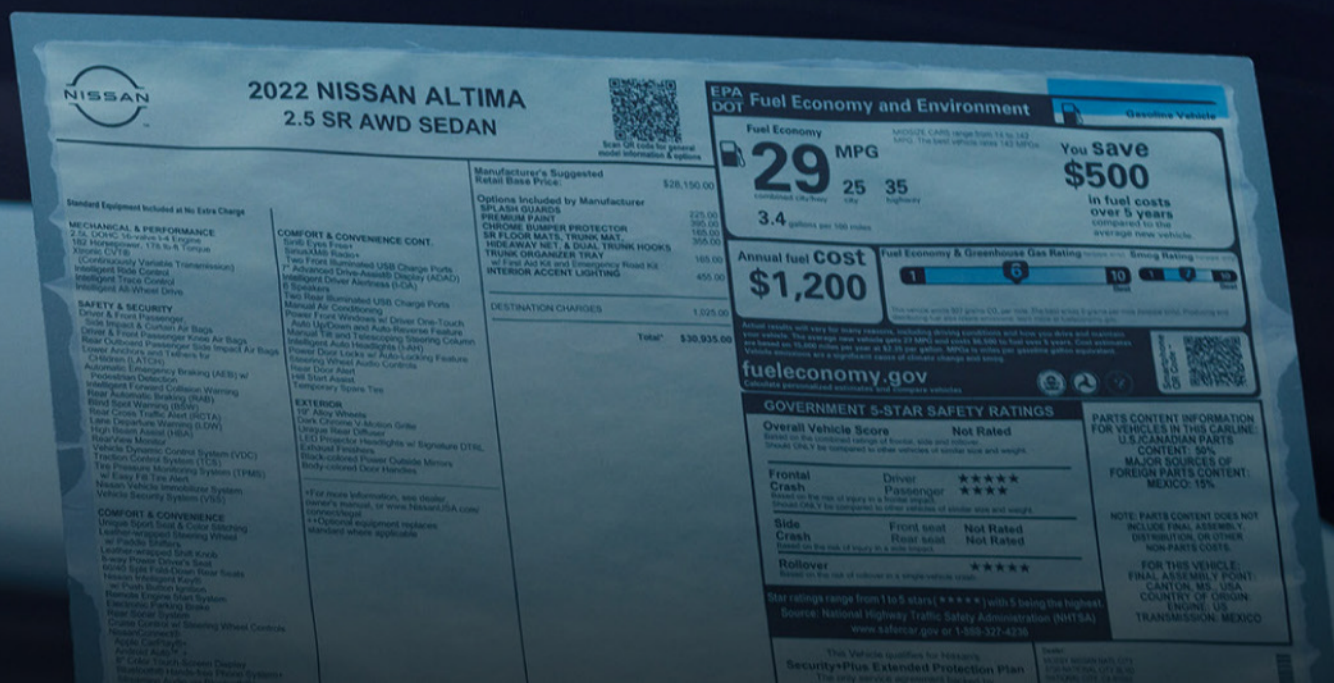
Unlike with new vehicles, there's still a limited supply of used cars, trucks and SUVs, which will likely serve to limit any price declines. That's mainly because the sluggish sales of new cars since 2020 has resulted in fewer trade-ins and vehicles coming off leases into the market, thereby keeping used-vehicle supplies tight.

Prices for some 1- and 2-year-old vehicles, Drury said, are nearly as expensive as the prices automakers are charging for new vehicles. Low-mileage 2023 Honda Accord EX models, for example, are being advertised at close to $28,000. At $31,000, the base price for a new one, including shipping, is not much more.

With an average used-vehicle loan rate of 11.5%, Drury said, it might be more cost-effective to pay slightly more for a new vehicle in order to secure a reduced rate from an automaker's finance arm.

For now, popular brands known for reliability, like Toyota and Honda, aren't offering discounts as generous as others.

"If you're willing to jump ship," Drury said, "be brand-agnostic. You can find a deal. They do exist."



BIDEN ACTS TO BETTER PROTECT AMERICANS' PERSONAL DATA SUCH AS HEALTH RECORDS AND FINANCES

President Joe Biden signed an executive order aimed at better protecting Americans' personal data on everything from biometrics and health records to finances and geolocation from foreign adversaries like China and Russia.

The attorney general and other federal agencies are to prevent the large-scale transfer of Americans' personal data to what the White House calls "countries of concern," while erecting safeguards around other activities that can give those countries access to people's sensitive data.

The goal is to do so without limiting legitimate commerce around data, senior Biden administration officials said on a call with reporters.

Biden's move targets commercial data brokers, the sometimes shadowy companies that traffic in personal data and that officials say may sell information to foreign adversaries or U.S. entities controlled by those countries.

Most eventual enforcement mechanisms still have to clear complicated and often monthslong rulemaking processes. Still, the administration hopes eventually to limit foreign entities, as well as foreign-controlled companies operating in the U.S., that might otherwise improperly collect sensitive data, the senior officials said.

Data brokers are legal in the U.S. and collect and categorize personal information, usually to build profiles on millions of Americans that the brokers then rent or sell.

The officials said activities like computer hacking are already prohibited in the U.S., but that buying potentially sensitive data through brokers is legal. That can represent a key gap in the nation's national security protections when data is sold to a broker knowing it could end up in the hands of an adversary — one the administration now aims to close with the president's executive action.

"Bad actors can use this data to track Americans, including military service members, pry into their personal lives, and pass that data on to other data brokers and foreign intelligence services," the White House wrote in a fact sheet announcing the move. "This data can enable intrusive surveillance, scams, blackmail, and other violations of privacy."

The order directs the Department of Justice to issue regulations that establish protections for Americans' sensitive personal data, as well as sensitive government-related data — including geolocation information on sensitive government sites and members of the military.

The Justice Department also plans to work with Homeland Security officials to build safety standards to prevent foreign adversaries from collecting data. It will further attempt better checks to ensure that federal grants going to various other agencies, including the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, aren't used to facilitate Americans' sensitive data flowing to foreign adversaries or U.S. companies aligned with them.

The senior administration officials listed potential countries of concern as China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Venezuela. But it is China — and TikTok, which has over 150 million American users and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Chinese technology firm ByteDance Ltd. — that U.S. leaders have been most vocal about.

Rep. Mike Gallagher, a Wisconsin Republican who chairs the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, recently noted, "There's no such thing as a private business in China."

The senior administration officials stressed that the executive action was designed to work in conjunction with legislative action. So far, however, numerous bills seeking to establish federal privacy protections have failed to advance in Congress.

Albert Fox Cahn, a Harvard fellow and executive director of the nonprofit Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, said Wednesday's order

doesn't address the core issue of Americans' exposure to rampant data collection by industry and government -- and the absence of a federal privacy law.

"For most Americans, the country of greatest concern on surveillance is the U.S. Americans are tracked every day by an increasingly invasive array of private data brokers and government agencies, transforming nearly every aspect of our digital lives into a marketing and policing tools," he said.

"This executive order will do almost nothing to address the real privacy needs that most Americans have, and continues to conflate surveillance capitalism with foreign surveillance. Only in Washington, does privacy once again get misunderstood as a foreign threat, rather than a domestic industry," he added. "None of this is a substitute for the civil rights and privacy protections the public so desperately needs."

Wednesday's move follows Biden's executive order on artificial intelligence last fall that seeks to balance the needs of cutting-edge technology companies with national security and consumer rights.

That sought to steer how AI is developed so that companies can profit without putting public safety in jeopardy, creating early guardrails meant to ensure that AI is trustworthy and helpful, rather than deceptive and destructive.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WITHOUT A LEAP DAY? MORE THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

Leap year. It's a delight for the calendar and math nerds among us. So how did it all begin and why?

Have a look at some of the numbers, history and lore behind the (not quite) every four year phenom that adds a 29th day to February.

BY THE NUMBERS

The math is mind-boggling in a layperson sort of way and down to fractions of days and minutes. There's even a leap second occasionally, but there's no hullabaloo when that happens.

The thing to know is that leap year exists, in large part, to keep the months in sync with annual events, including equinoxes and solstices, according to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory at the California Institute of Technology.

It's a correction to counter the fact that Earth's orbit isn't precisely 365 days a year. The trip takes about six hours longer than that, NASA says.

Contrary to what some might believe, however, not every four years is a leaper. Adding a leap day every four years would make the calendar longer by more than 44 minutes, according to the National Air & Space Museum.

Later, on a calendar yet to come (we'll get to it), it was decreed that years divisible by 100 not follow the four-year leap day rule unless they are also divisible by 400, the JPL notes. In the past 500 years, there was no leap day in 1700, 1800 and 1900, but 2000 had one. In the next 500 years, if the practice is followed, there will be no leap day in 2100, 2200, 2300 and 2500.

Still with us?

The next leap years are 2028, 2032 and 2036.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WITHOUT A LEAP DAY?

Eventually, nothing good in terms of when major events fall, when farmers plant and how seasons align with the sun and the moon.

"Without the leap years, after a few hundred years we will have summer in November," said Younas Khan, a physics instructor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Spirit of St.Louis
N-X-211

"Christmas will be in summer. There will be no snow. There will be no feeling of Christmas."

WHO CAME UP WITH LEAP YEAR?

The short answer: It evolved.

Ancient civilizations used the cosmos to plan their lives, and there are calendars dating back to the Bronze Age. They were based on either the phases of the moon or the sun, as various calendars are today. Usually they were "lunisolar," using both.

Now hop on over to the Roman Empire and Julius Caesar. He was dealing with major seasonal drift on calendars used in his neck of the woods. They dealt badly with drift by adding months. He was also navigating a vast array of calendars starting in a vast array of ways in the vast Roman Empire.

He introduced his Julian calendar in 46 BCE. It was purely solar and counted a year at 365.25 days, so once every four years an extra day was added. Before that, the Romans counted a year at 355 days, at least for a time.

But still, under Julius, there was drift. There were too many leap years! The solar year isn't precisely 365.25 days! It's 365.242 days, said Nick Eakes, an astronomy educator at the Morehead Planetarium and Science Center at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

Thomas Palaima, a classics professor at the University of Texas at Austin, said adding periods of time to a year to reflect variations in the lunar and solar cycles was done by the ancients. The Athenian calendar, he said, was used in

the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries with 12 lunar months.

That didn't work for seasonal religious rites. The drift problem led to "intercalating" an extra month periodically to realign with lunar and solar cycles, Palaima said.

The Julian calendar was 0.0078 days (11 minutes and 14 seconds) longer than the tropical year, so errors in timekeeping still gradually accumulated, according to NASA. But stability increased, Palaima said.

The Julian calendar was the model used by the Western world for hundreds of years. Enter Pope Gregory XIII, who calibrated further. His Gregorian calendar took effect in the late 16th century. It remains in use today and, clearly, isn't perfect or there would be no need for leap year. But it was a big improvement, reducing drift to mere seconds.

Why did he step in? Well, Easter. It was coming later in the year over time, and he fretted that events related to Easter like the Pentecost might bump up against pagan festivals. The pope wanted Easter to remain in the spring.

He eliminated some extra days accumulated on the Julian calendar and tweaked the rules on leap day. It's Pope Gregory and his advisers who came up with the really gnarly math on when there should or shouldn't be a leap year.

"If the solar year was a perfect 365.25 then we wouldn't have to worry about the tricky math involved," Eakes said.

TRIPLE DOG DARE KIT

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH LEAP YEAR AND MARRIAGE?

Bizarrely, leap day comes with lore about women popping the marriage question to men. It was mostly benign fun, but it came with a bite that reinforced gender roles.

There's distant European folklore. One story places the idea of women proposing in fifth century Ireland, with St. Bridget appealing to St. Patrick to offer women the chance to ask men to marry them, according to historian Katherine Parkin in a 2012 paper in the Journal of Family History.

Nobody really knows where it all began.

In 1904, syndicated columnist Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer, aka Dorothy Dix, summed up the tradition this way: "Of course people will say ... that a woman's leap year prerogative, like most of her liberties, is merely a glittering mockery."

The pre-Sadie Hawkins tradition, however serious or tongue-in-cheek, could have empowered women but merely perpetuated stereotypes. The proposals were to happen via postcard, but many such cards turned the tables and poked fun at women instead.

Advertising perpetuated the leap year marriage game. A 1916 ad by the American Industrial Bank and Trust Co. read thusly: "This being Leap Year day, we suggest to every girl that she propose to her father to open a savings account in her name in our own bank."

There was no breath of independence for women due to leap day.

SHOULD WE PITY THE LEAPLINGS?

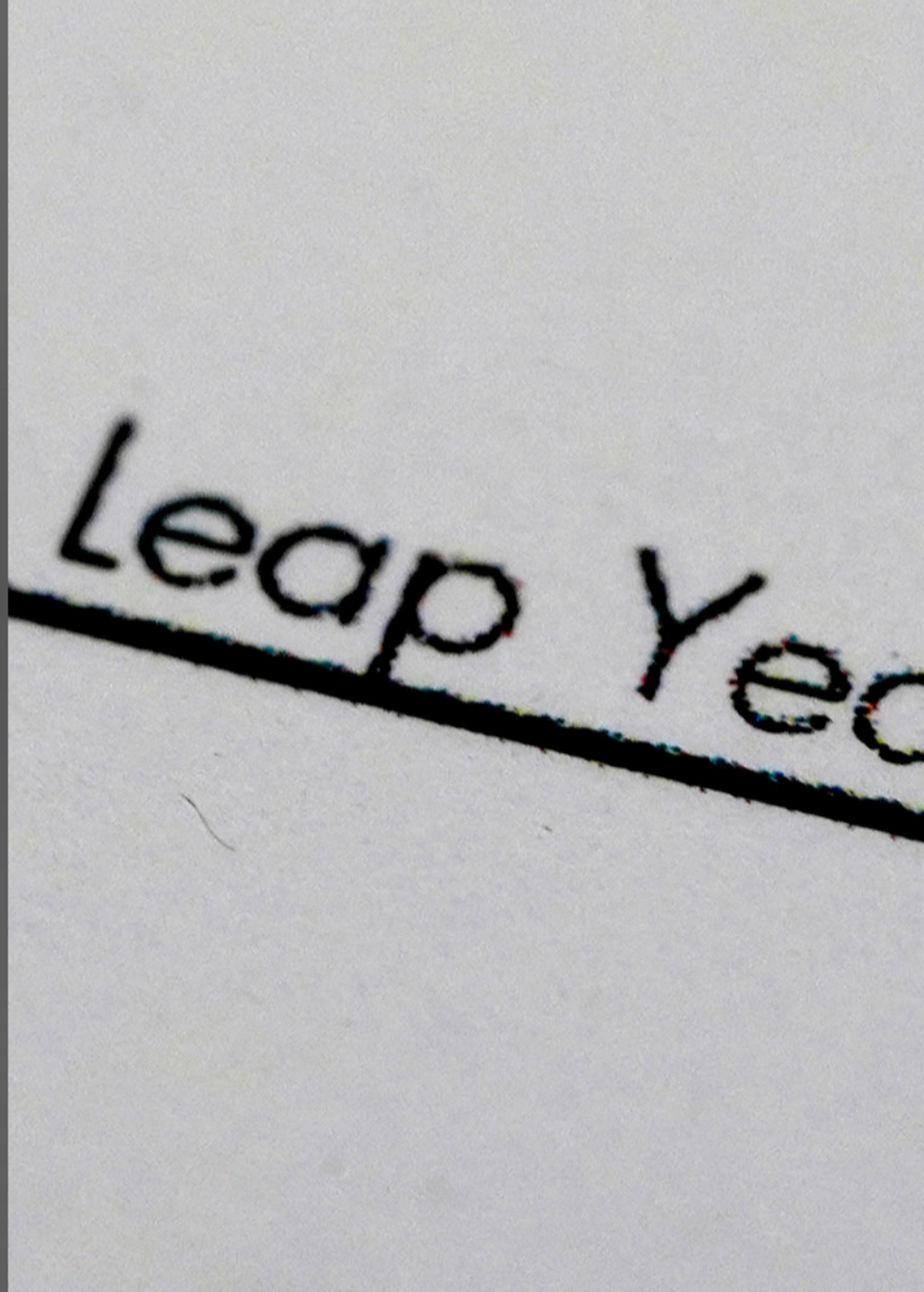
Being born in a leap year on a leap day certainly is a talking point. But it can be kind of a pain from a paperwork perspective. Some governments and others requiring forms to be filled out and birthdays to be stated stepped in to declare what date was used by leaplings for such things as drivers licenses, whether Feb. 28 or March 1.

Technology has made it far easier for leap babies to jot down their Feb. 29 milestones, though there can be glitches in terms of health systems, insurance policies and with other businesses and organization that don't have that date built in.

There are about 5 million people worldwide who share the leap birthday out of about 8 billion people on the planet. Shelley Dean, 23, in Seattle, Washington, chooses a rosy attitude about being a leapling. Growing up, she had normal birthday parties each year, but an extra special one when leap years rolled around. Since, as an adult, she marks that non-leap period between Feb. 28 and March 1 with a low-key "whew."

This year is different.

"It will be the first birthday that I'm going to celebrate with my family in eight years, which is super exciting, because the last leap day I was on the other side of the country in New York for college," she said. "It's a very big year."



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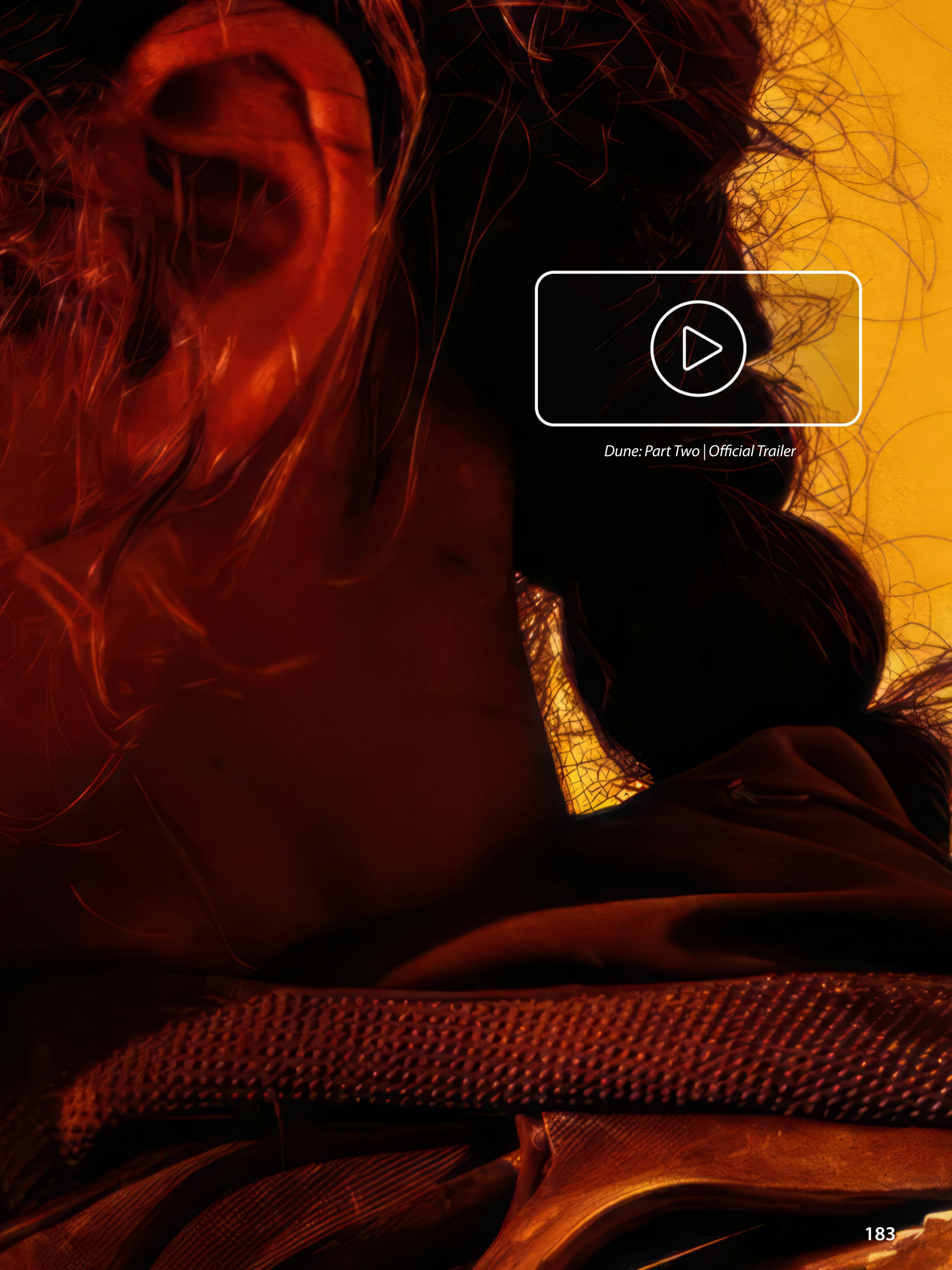
‘DUNE: PART TWO’ SUSTAINS THE DYSTOPIAN DREAM OF ‘PART ONE’

REVIEW



Dune: Part Two | Official Trailer

Three firm thumps into the Arrakis sand is all you need to summon a sandworm in Denis Villeneuve's "Dune: Part Two." It's almost as easy as hailing a cab or calling for the check.

The big buggers can't resist the sound, which is a little like how I feel taking in all the vibrations of Villeneuve's adaptation of Frank Herbert's 1965 science-fiction novel. Whispers, incantations and guttural sounds buzz throughout "Part Two," a hissing hulk of a sequel that fluctuates between ominous silences and thunderous booms.

The first "Dune," released in 2021 when movie theaters were still humbled by the pandemic, tackled just the first half of Herbert's opus, saving the second half for the sequel. That split can be owed in part to the enormous amount of plot contained in the novel, but it can also be attributed to the operatic rhythms of Villeneuve's solemn spectacle. Sober as they are, "Dune" parts one and two are almost drunk on their own sense of atmosphere.

And with good reason. Like its predecessor, "Dune: Part Two" thrums with an intoxicating big-screen expressionism of monoliths and mosquitos, fevered visions and messianic fervor — more dystopian dream, or nightmare, than a straightforward narrative.

That filmmaking prowess sometimes comes at the expense of other things. Humor, for one, is in shorter supply on Arrakis than water. Javier Bardem, returning as the Fremen leader Stilgar, alone seems to want to breathe a little laughter into all the fiery red sands and mammoth machinery of "Dune."

"Part Two" primarily follows the rise of Paul Atreides (Timothée Chalamet), who, after seeing

Dune: Part Two | Official Trailer 2

his father killed and House Atreides routed from the Arrakis capital by House Harkonnen and Baron Vladimir Harkonnen (a monstrously good Stellan Skarsgård), is now living among the Fremen, the desert-dwelling peoples of Arrakis, with his mother Lady Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson).

The myth of Paul is already growing among the Fremen, who call him Muad'Dib. (A great feature of these movies, like Hebert's books, is the exquisite names.) Is he the chosen one or a false prophet? Doubts are gradually erased by his accomplishments (leading strikes against Harkonnen spice harvesters; quickly learning the ways of the Fremen); the cunning maneuvering of Lady Jessica; and the worshipful zeal of Stilgar.

The Fremen warrior Chani (Zendaya), though skeptical of the hype, believes, with some reluctance, in Paul. "Part Two" is significantly propped up by their dynamic and budding romance, a relationship that gives a deserving wide-screen canvas to two of the most exciting young movie stars of their generation.

For a while it's fun and games in the desert, blowing up stuff and learning how to ride sand worms. Oh, there's the matter of the "holy poison" forced on Lady Jessica, a neon-blue liquid extracted from sand worms that looks like it would produce a fine Slush Puppie, but, if it doesn't kill you, confers a frightful clairvoyance of the universe.

Blue is an important color in the otherwise darker shaded "Dune." It lights up in Lady Jessica's eyes and, later, Paul's too. If you thought Peter O'Toole's eyes blazed in "Lawrence of Arabia," Paul's look like they've been pumped through with windshield-wiper fluid. As his following swells,

Paul grows increasingly aware, and fearful, of his god-like power.

"Dune: Part Two" spends much of its energy with Paul wrestling with this supposed messianic destiny. Like "Lawrence of Arabia," he's a white protagonist from the West (or, here, the "Outer World") on a Middle Eastern-like desert, leading the revolution of a dark-skinned population against oppressors whom he, himself, has deep ties to.

Herbert's metaphor-rife book has sometimes been interpreted — or misinterpreted, scholars would say — by the alt-right for its racial politics. Villeneuve's film, scripted by the director and Jon Spaihts, appears highly conscious of this legacy as well as that of the white-savior trope. And often — as in so much of these two films — the movie expresses itself most through imagery and movement.

The Harkonnens, universally white, bald and violent, are served up as the symbol of colonist rule. In the middle of "Part Two," the film introduces the Harkonnen prince Feyd-Rautha (a hairless Austin Butler, looking a bit too much like the albino protagonist of 1995's "Powder") who is a kind of opposite to Paul. He, too, could take command of Arrakis.

When Villeneuve temporarily switches to Feyd-Rautha's story and away from Paul and Chani, the film's richly orchestrated sense of momentum falters. But the comparison is illuminating. In a massive colosseum, Feyd-Rautha ruthlessly battles a trio of Atreides survivors in a scene, bleached in monochrome, that looks like "Triumph of the Will," supersized.

Dune: Part Two | Official Trailer 3

Dune: Part Two | Extended Sneak Preview

There's an earnest reckoning here in the power dynamics of the source material and previous Hollywood tales of first-and-third world confrontations. There's plenty of doubt to go around for all involved, too. The movie's perspective ultimately resides in the drained, shrouded face of Charlotte Rampling, who plays the matriarch of the Bene Gesserit (again, the names!), a mystic order that pulls the strings behind the galactic politics of "Dune." For her, it's a game of raw calculation and "no sides."

As "Part Two" brings all parties together for the final act, it begins to loose steam. The Emperor (Christopher Walken) and his daughter Princess Irulan (Florence Pugh), seen sporadically from afar debating the events on Arrakis, turn up. But while Walken's company is always welcome, he might be too warm a presence for "Dune" — too much of the Earth despite so often seeming on a planet of his own.

Yet the limpness of the finale, despite all of the expert build-up of Hans Zimmer's score and Mark Mangini and Theo Green's sound design, goes to something deeper. Villeneuve's great talent lies, I think, in invocation. He may be less perfect when it comes to conclusions but he's brilliant at summoning — a sense of doom, a suddenly appeared spacecraft, a sandworm. Even better than those serpentine sand creatures (the runaway stars of "Part Two") is that thump, thump, thump that precedes them.

"Dune: Part Two," a Warner Bros. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for sequences of strong violence, some suggestive material and brief strong language. Running time: 165 minutes. Three stars out of four.

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TAIWAN GIANT CHIPMAKER TSMC OPENS FIRST PLANT IN JAPAN AS PART OF KEY GLOBAL EXPANSION

Chip giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. opened last weekend in an official ceremony its first semiconductor plant in Japan as part of its ongoing global expansion.

"We are deeply grateful for the seamless support provided by you at every step," TSMC Chairman Mark Liu said after thanking the Japanese government, local community and business partners, including electronic giant Sony and auto-parts maker Denso. The company's founder Morris Chang, was also present.

This comes as Japan is trying to regain its presence in the chip production industry.

Image: Jakub Porzycki

tsm

The Japan Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing, or JASM, is set to be up and running later this year. TSMC also announced plans for a second plant in Japan earlier this month, with production expected to start in about three years. Private sector investment totals $20 billion for both plants. Both plants are in the Kumamoto region, southwestern Japan.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida sent a congratulatory video message, calling the plant's opening "a giant first step." He stressed Japan's friendly relations with Taiwan and the importance of cutting-edge semiconductor technology.

Japan had previously promised TSMC 476 billion yen ($3 billion) in government funding to encourage the semiconductor giant to invest. Kishida confirmed a second package, raising Japan's support to more than 1 trillion yen ($7 billion).

Although TSMC is building its second plant in the U.S. and has announced a plan for its first in Europe, Japan could prove an attractive option.

Closer to Taiwan geographically, Japan is an important U.S. ally. Neighboring China claims the self-governing island as its own territory and says it must come under Beijing's control. The long-running divide is a flashpoint in U.S.-China relations.

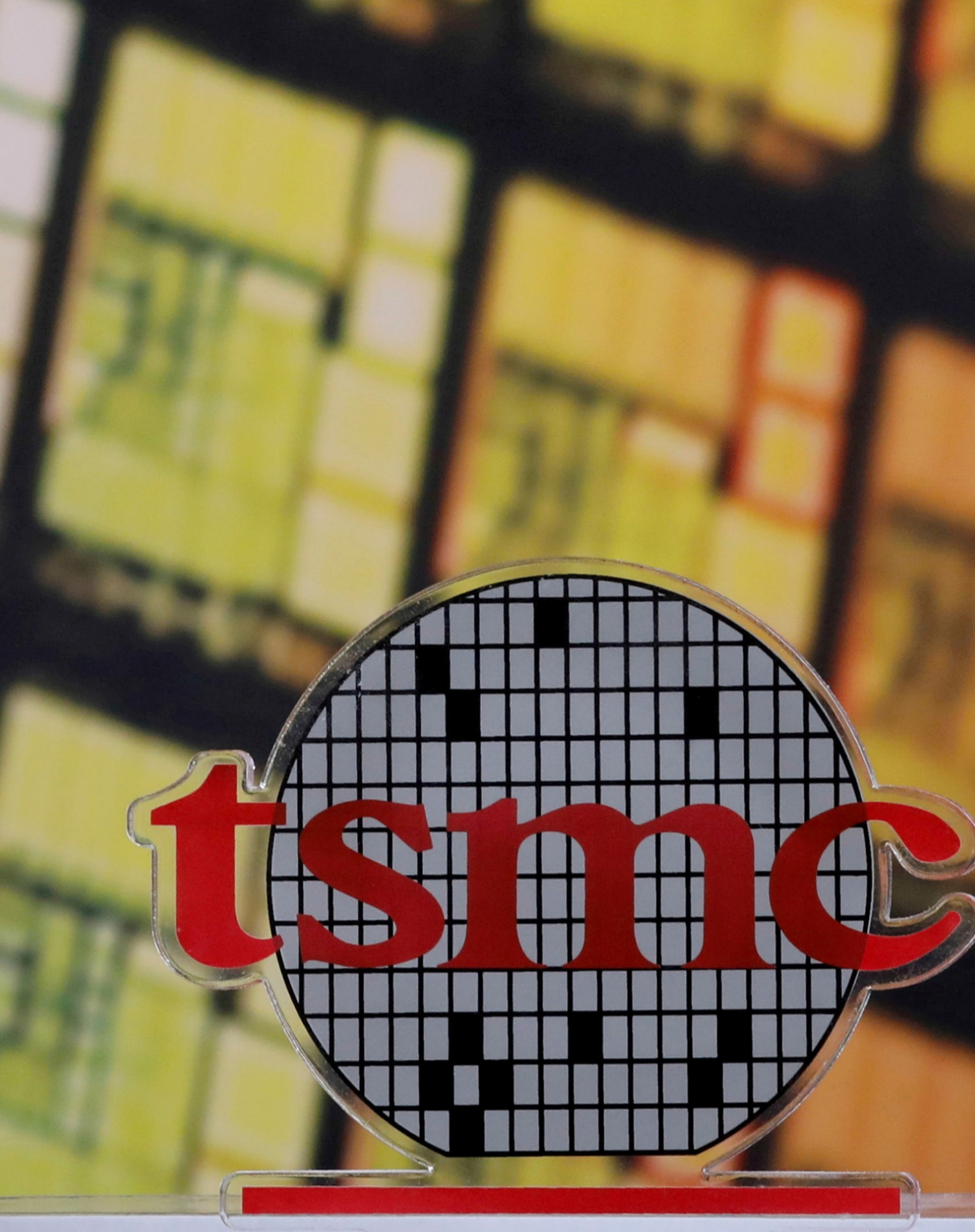


Image: Tyrone Siu

The move is also important for Japan, which has recently earmarked about 5 trillion yen ($33 billion) to revive its chips industry.

Four decades ago, Japan dominated in chips, headlined by Toshiba Corp. and NEC controlling half the world's production. That's declined lately to under 10%, due to competition from South Korean, U.S. and European manufacturers, as well as from TSMC.

The coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected the supply of electronic chips, stalling plants, including automakers, with Japan almost entirely dependent on chip imports. This has pushed Japan to seek chip production in pursuit of self-sufficiency.

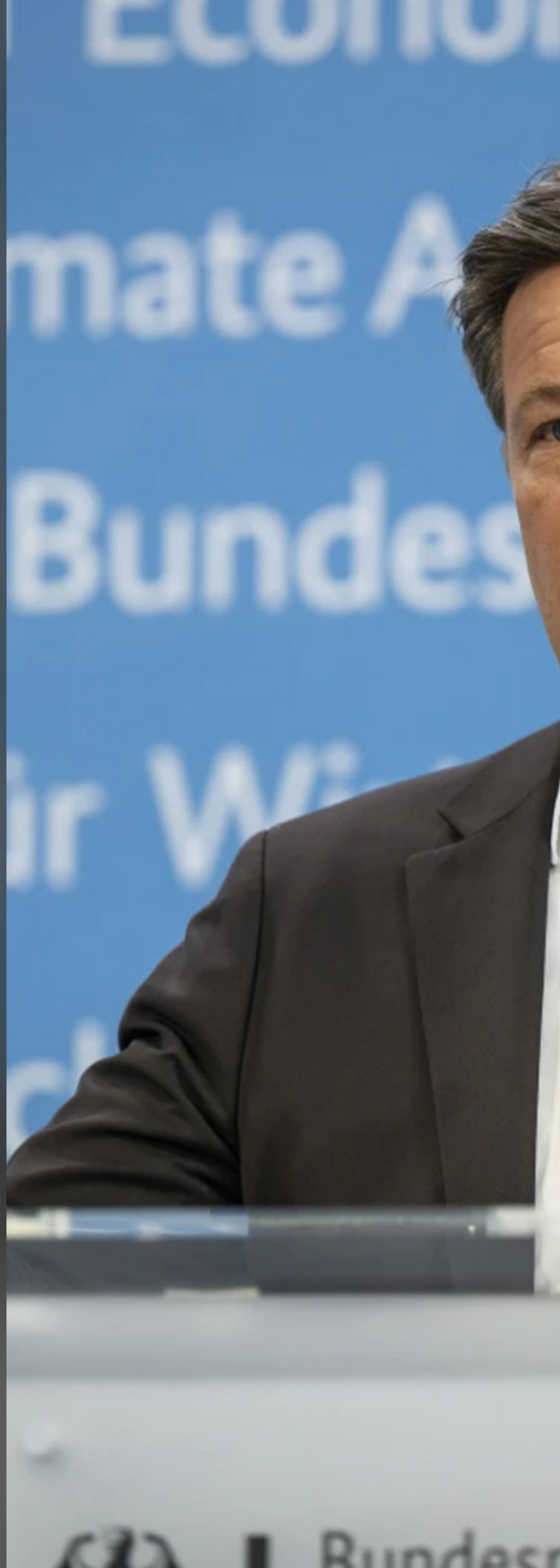
Sony Semiconductor Solutions Corp. — wholly owned by Sony Corp. — Denso Corp. and top automaker Toyota Motor Corp. are investing in TSMC's Japan plant, with the Taiwanese giant retaining an 86.5% ownership of JASM.

Once the two plants are up and running, they're expected to create 3,400 high-tech jobs directly, according to TSMC.

Ensuring access to an ample supply of the most advanced chips is vital with the growing popularity of electric vehicles, as well as artificial intelligence. Some analysts note Japan still leads in crucial aspects of the industry, as seen in Tokyo Electron, which manufactures the machinery used to produce chips.

Still, it's clear the Japanese government is intent on playing catchup. Tokyo is supporting various semiconductor projects nationwide, such as those involving Western Digital and Micron of the U.S., and Japanese companies like Renesas Electronics, Canon and Sumitomo.

GERMANY PLANS TO ENABLE UNDERGROUND STORAGE OF CARBON DIOXIDE AT OFFSHORE SITES



Germany plans to enable underground carbon storage at offshore sites, pushing ahead with a much-discussed technology in an acknowledgement that time is running out to combat climate change, the country's vice chancellor said this week.

Europe's biggest economy is making good progress with expanding renewable energy sources and usage, but a solution is needed for the carbon dioxide emitted by some sectors such

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as the cement industry that are "hard to abate," said Robert Habeck, who is also the economy and climate minister.

Germany, which is home to many energy-intensive industries, aims to cut its emissions to "net zero" by 2045.

Habeck's proposed "carbon management strategy," which still needs to be turned into detailed legislation, foresees enabling the transport of carbon dioxide and its storage under the sea in Germany's exclusive economic zone, except in marine conservation areas. It doesn't foresee allowing storage sites on land, but Habeck said that could be considered later if German state governments approve.

Opponents maintain that so-called carbon capture and storage is unproven at scale and has been less effective than alternatives such as solar and wind at decarbonizing the energy sector.

Habeck, a member of the environmentalist Green party, recalled opposition to carbon storage when it was discussed in the 2000s. But he said "the technology has been developed further ... and from my point of view it is mature and safe," and that it is now being used elsewhere, not just in research projects.

Neighboring Denmark last year launched an ambitious project that aims to bury vast amounts of carbon dioxide beneath the North Sea.

"Time has run out," Habeck said at a news conference in Berlin. "In the 2000s, you could perhaps say, 'let's wait and see what might happen'; today we see that we haven't found any technological solution for cement and other areas that ensures climate neutrality."

"We are heading toward exceeding 1.5 degrees, which means that we are no longer in a luxury or comfort zone where we can somehow wait," Habeck added. "We have to use what we have."

He was referencing the international goal of trying to limit future warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times.

Stopping warming at 1.5 C or so can avoid or at least lessen some of the most catastrophic future climate change harms and for some people is a life-or-death matter, scientists have found in many reports.

Habeck said it will be "a few years" before Germany can store CO2 under the sea, and that it would be wise to coordinate European initiatives. As well as the Danish project, he pointed to Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Environmental group Greenpeace complained that the German plans "bear the mark of the energy industry and heavy industry" and would allow even industries for which there are "climate-friendly solutions" to carry on as they have to date.

"That is expensive, not sustainable and encumbers future generations with further long-term liabilities," Karsten Smid, an energy expert with the group's German branch, said in a statement.

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